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Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor

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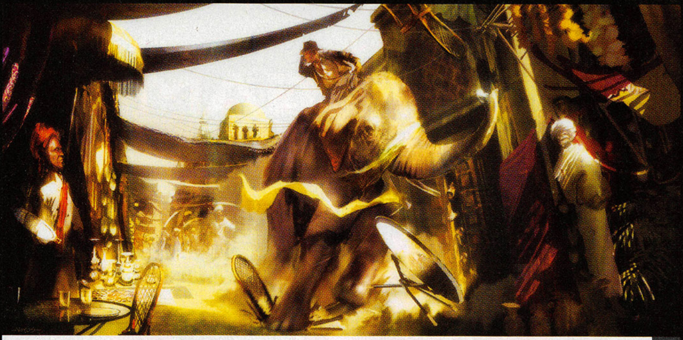
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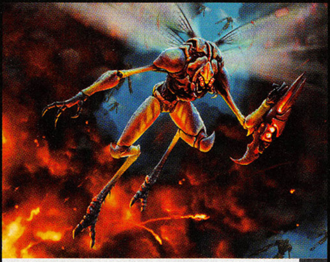
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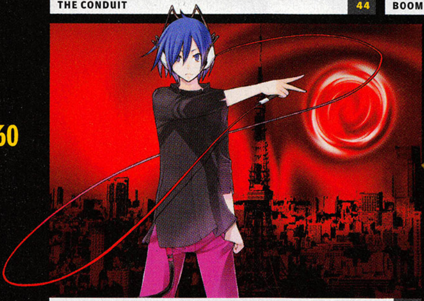
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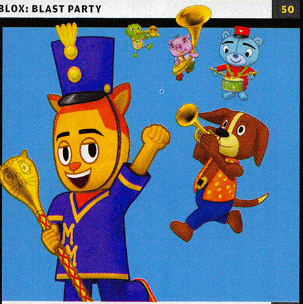

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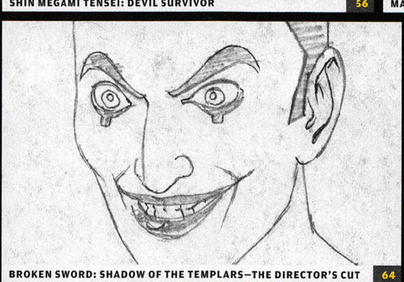
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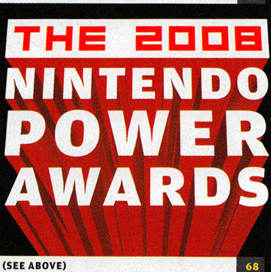

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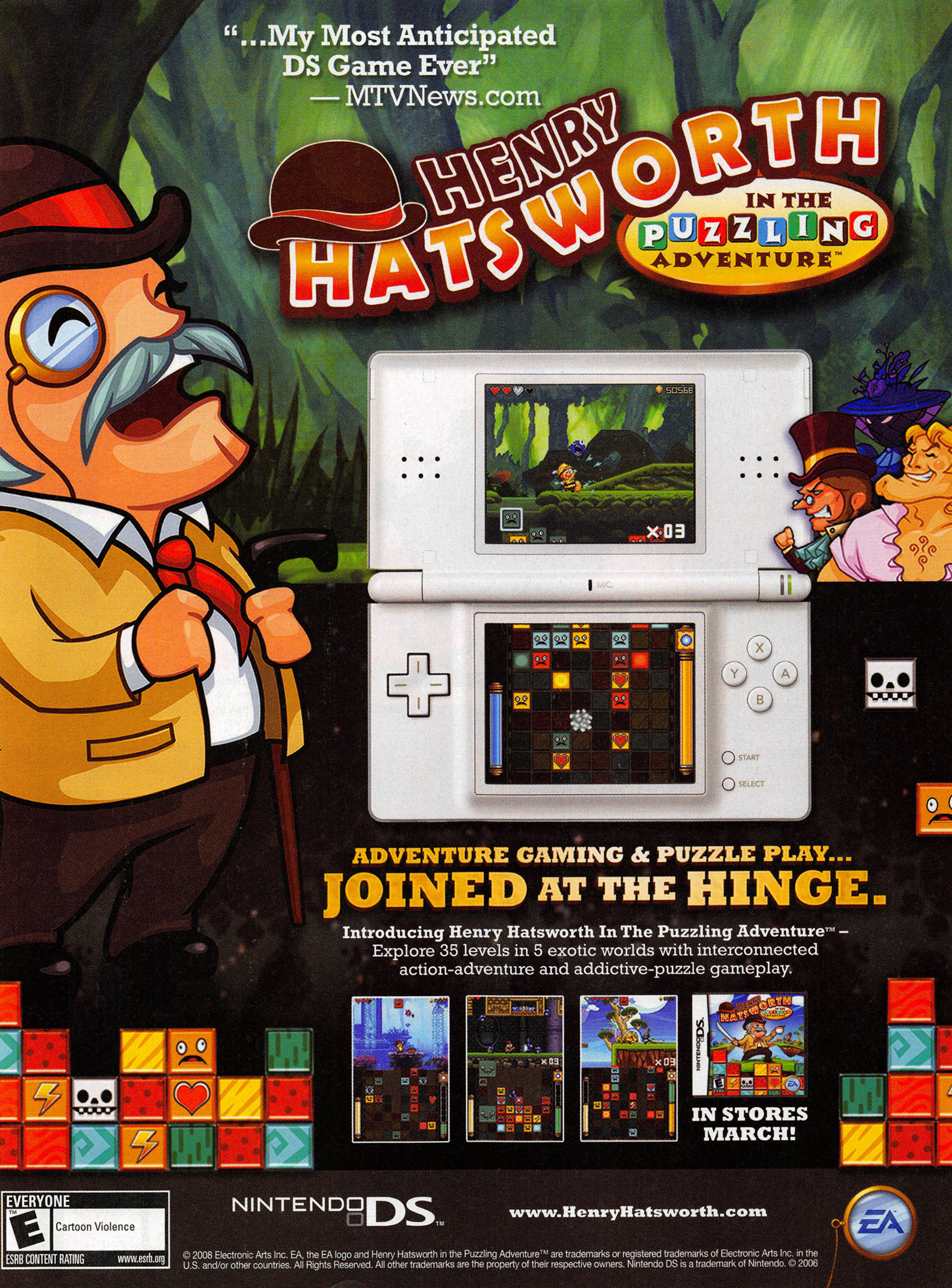

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NINTENDO POWER

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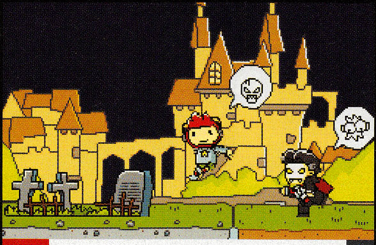

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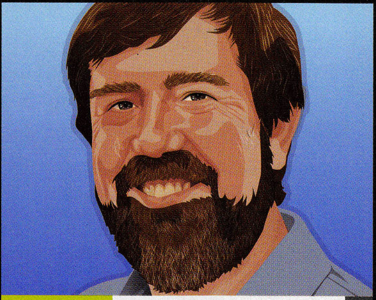

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DS = NINTENDO DS
NES = NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
WW = WiiWare

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Pulse

Movie Magic

Chris Slate

Although games based on movies and licensed characters have gotten better over the years, I'm still surprised when one turns out really well. The developers who get them right focus on the qualities that fans love about the license, while other creators lazily force popular characters into generic game designs that don't properly feature what fans want to see. This is how we've ended up with games where, for example, Superman walks along a city street just punching people, when he's much more interesting up in the sky, catching falling planes and punching meteors into space. Thankfully, 2009 is off to a good start with a couple of great-looking licensed games. Indiana Jones's first Wii adventure makes fun use of his whip and offers plenty of puzzle-solving mysteries (see our cover story on pg. 36), and TMNT rightly focuses on hardcore fighting with a fun, party atmosphere. Could this be the start of a new trend?

CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

DS
GUITAR HERO MODERN HITS
We reveal the next chart-topping DS game!
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HOUSE OF THE DEAD OVERKILL: BEST WII SHOOTER?
EXCLUSIVE
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The hit sci-fi series comes to DS with 4-player online co-op!
RPG SPECIAL
Future
REVIEWED
TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS for Wii

V238 FEBRUARY 2009

Chris Slate here, back once again to answer your letters between delicious bites of chilled monkey brains and snake surprise. But first, this month's special letter request: what movie would you love to seen made into a Wii or DS game? Send your responses to the address on page 8, and we'll print the best ones!

LETTERS

MISTY GOLDENEYES

I recently pulled out my old N64, which still had GoldenEye 007 in it. Boy, did the memories come rushing back. It doesn't seem like it was that long ago that I would play this game with my friends for hours without stopping, waiting for them to leave the room so I could use the invincibility code. I hooked it back up and my friends were eager to start playing again. GoldenEye is truly one of the all-time best first-person shooters. **—MASTER KOOPA**

GoldenEye is certainly a classic; here at Pulse, we continue to get letters about the game from devoted fans every month. But you might want to put it away before your friends read this issue and spot your letter—unless you like the idea of playing against all of them while they're invincible.

SAVE THE WORLD IN JUST MINUTES A DAY

I was wondering if anyone at NP could suggest good but short RPGs. My family has a really tight schedule, and I usually don't have enough time to finish an RPG before a new game comes out that I want. So, do you experts have any suggestions for RPGs that don't take very long to beat, but still have a good storyline? **—POKEY**

In terms of sheer speed, it's hard to beat the two Naruto: Path of the Ninja titles for DS—neither is especially great, but you can hurry through them in just 10-12 hours. If you can spare 20-25 hours, we strongly suggest Chrono Trigger, Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood, and The World Ends with You, which are all also for DS. Actually, it's much easier to squeeze in more play time with the handheld since you can keep it in sleep mode and pop it open whenever you've got a few spare minutes, wherever you happen to be.

Choose a target.

Chrono Trigger [left], Sonic Chronicles [lower left], and The World Ends with You [below] are great, speedy RPGs.

I knew that the DS was a good system for RPGs, but until I read Vol. 238 (your "RPG special"), I didn't know the half of it. I'm especially excited by the more unusual titles, such as Sands of Destruction, in which you set out to destroy the world. Now *that's* different! **—SARA H.**

I'm right there with you, Sara! I play only the occasional RPG, but so many of these upcoming titles have such innovative and compelling hooks that I'm ready to dive into the genre in a big way. I don't know where I'll get the hundreds of hours needed to play them all, but who needs sleep?

RPG SPECIAL

It's the end of the world as we know it in Sands of Destruction on DS.

DESTRUCTION IS AT HAND

Not since it turned Anakin Skywalker into a whining, complaining wuss has sand been so volatile. Coarse and rough and irritating is one thing, but destructive? That's something else. Old Ani probably wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere near Sands of Destruction, the next big DS RPG from Sega and ImageEpoch.

STATS

WHAT A RUSH

UNUSUALLY GOOD

Boogerman: A Pick and Flick Adventure was the best Genesis game that wasn't a Sonic title, and now that it's on Virtual Console, I still love it—it's just disgusting enough to make me laugh and my older sister puke. Speaking of cult hits, I wish Seifuku Densetsu Pretty Fighter and Super Variable Geo would hit VC. I tend to enjoy the unusual, but hey, somebody's got to. **—(NO NAME GIVEN)**

There's nothing wrong with supporting the more unusual titles. Lately I've spent a lot of time playing Rhythm Tengoku Gold (the Japanese version of Rhythm Heaven, which will release here sometime over the coming months). That game is one of the nuttiest—and best—titles I've ever played. (I'll have much more to say about it soon!)

Even a guy who calls himself "Boogerman" has his admirers.

HEARING THINGS

I know this sounds crazy, but Donkey Kong is French! I was racing as him in Mario Kart Wii, and when I mini-turboed, he said "chapeau," which is French for "hat." **—(NO NAME GIVEN)**

That doesn't sound crazy at all—almost certainly incorrect, but not crazy. You want to hear *crazy*? In Resident Evil 4, I always thought it sounded like the evil monks were chanting "play Halo," which would make even less sense than Donkey Kong yelling "hat" at people.

It's hard to imagine Donkey Kong learning to speak French when he can't put his tie on forward.

LINKING ZELDAS

I have the most important question in the universe: is there a timeline that links all of the Legend of Zelda titles? This has been nagging at me ever since I borrowed my friend's numerous Zelda games. **—MAGICAL_MAN_BEHIND_THE_CURTAIN**

There is no official timeline that puts every Zelda game in order, but certain installments do specify or hint at connections to others. The most obvious example is that Majora's Mask is a direct sequel to Ocarina of Time. Also, the world from those games can be found hidden underwater in The Wind Waker, complete with references to the "Hero of Time," as Link came to be known in his N64 adventures. Furthermore, Phantom Hourglass is a continuation of the characters and setting of The Wind Waker. I hope that helps you rest a little easier!

OVERSMASHED

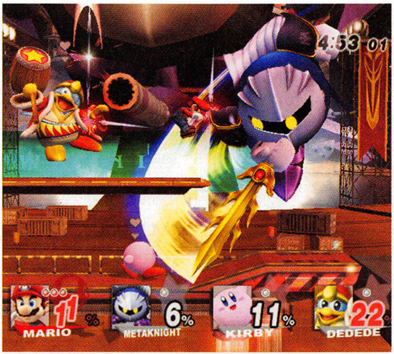
Last night I played Brawl for three and a half hours. When I went to sleep, I had a dream in which—instead of dropping the crystal ball on New Year's Eve—they dropped a Smash Ball and it floated above everyone's heads while they tried to jump and hit it. Does this mean I'm a worthy Brawler? **—THOMAS G.**

Thomas, I think it means you need an intervention.

DON'T HASSLE THE HOFF

After reading Chris Hoffman's Sonic and the Black Knight article in Vol. 237, I have one small request: COULD HE PLEASE STOP CALLING TAILS A "MUTANT SQUIRREL?!" Tails is a twin-tailed fox or, if you want to get more technical, a *kitsune*! (I know that *kitsune* are more like fox spirits or fox demons, but the term can also refer to a fox with more than one tail!) I just thought I'd get that off my chest before I explode. You guys have insulted Tails this way three times! **—LIGHT TRAINER**

CHRIS HOFFMAN: Look, I didn't want to be the one to break this news, but the truth is that Tails was merely adopted by foxes when he was an infant. He's actually from a family of squirrels and was abandoned by his parents after they saw he was a mutant. His last name isn't even really Prower. Sega doesn't like to talk about it, just like they don't like to talk about Tails's gambling problem. *[Editor's note: Folks, you're just encouraging him.]*



My favorite gaming moment of 2008 was playing Super Smash Bros. Brawl for the first time. Winning my first match as Meta Knight gave me the best feeling I've ever gotten from a game, and my brother, my best friend, and I all bonded from the experience. —**PARAGOOMBA101**

FAVORITE GAMING MOMENTS OF 2008

"You have 7 Days." That quote pulled me into The World Ends with You, a world full of dark mysteries, unique characters, and addictive gameplay. My favorite gaming moment of '08 is definitely when I first played that game. The intro sequence...talk about WOW. I hadn't been pulled into a game so fast since Ocarina of Time. Neku's character is really what did it; the way he talks, thinks, and acts adds to the mystery. I bow deeply to Square Enix for releasing such an emotionally powerful, awe-inspiring game. 2008 wouldn't have been the same without it. **—KEYLIMEPIEAT3AM**

My favorite gaming moment of '08 was when I finally beat Marx Soul in Kirby Super Star Ultra. The ending is awesome, and Kirby's dance is so *cute*! **—WOBUFFET3**

The best gaming moment of 2008 would have to be the cut-scene in Brawl's Subspace Emissary mode where Link accuses Mario of turning Zelda to stone. Because of that hilarious scene, Mario became my family's official scapegoat for everything. For example, when we stayed at a hotel over the summer, a chunk of the ceiling fell into the pool because the whirlpool in the room above it overflowed, and my cousin figured that Mario must've thought the whirlpool was a mini-pool and jumped in doing a cannonball. **—JOAN K.**

My favorite moment was facing Albus and Barlowe as bosses in Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia. The soundtracks for each boss were extraordinary, as were the voice clips (e.g., Albus's maniacal laugh, his cry of "Shanoaaa!" upon defeat, and Barlowe's commentary throughout his battle with Shanoa). I can't tell you how many times I fought these two characters just to listen to the cool background music! **—DAREN B.**

There is one gaming moment that sticks out in my mind as the greatest: finally getting to play Chrono Trigger thanks to the DS remake. I was about 6 years old in 1995 when the original version came out alongside some of the other all-time best RPGs, like EarthBound (Super NES rocks!). But because I was so young and not the savviest gamer, I didn't notice them at the time. Now that I've finally gotten to play Chrono Trigger, I can honestly say that it has taken over as my favorite game. Once you play something of this caliber, your view of video games changes. **—(NO NAME GIVEN)**

My favorite moment of 2008 is when I found out that a new Animal Crossing was coming out for Wii. I loved the original GameCube game and Animal Crossing: Wild World for DS, so when I read about City Folk's new online and Wii Speak microphone capabilities, I was ecstatic! Thanks, NP, for informing me of this momentous new release. **—(NO NAME GIVEN)**

Those were all definite highlights for the year—thanks for sharing your stories! As for me, my favorite moments were all come-from-behind online victories in Mario Kart Wii. Conversely, my least-favorite moments came from getting hit with Spiky Shells just before reaching a finish line. Curse you, Mario Kart—I love you, then hate you!

CORRECTION On the cover of Vol. 238, we incorrectly listed Tenchu: Shadow Assassins as Tenchu: Stealth Assassins, which was the title of an older game in the series. We humbly await our ninja punishment.

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Don't ask about the status of upcoming games, or whether certain games will be announced; if we have that info, we'll always tell you.

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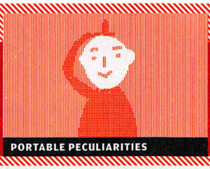
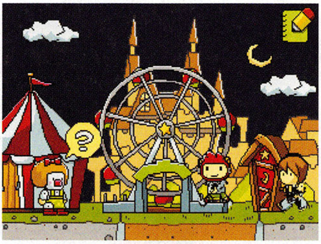
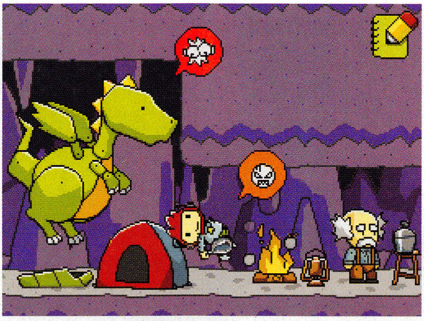


The Write Stuff

The pen *begets* a sword...and a satellite dish... and a sasquatch in Scribblenauts, the latest DS experiment from the makers of Drawn to Life and Lock's Quest.



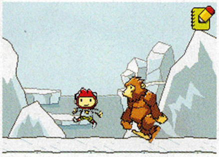
The DS has certainly seen its share of unique gameplay concepts, but the folks at 5th Cell may have come up with the most original yet. In their new puzzle-platformer, entitled Scribblenauts, you can write anything and have it appear in the game. Yes, *anything*, according to 5th Cell. Your goal is to help young hero Maxwell collect special items called Starites, and how you go about that is entirely up to you. In one early level, for instance, there's a Starite stuck in a tree. You could write "ladder" to climb up and retrieve the shiny bauble, "axe" to cut down the tree, or "beaver" to enlist the aid of a woodland critter. The developers are putting a lot of work into tweaking the physics and getting each object to behave as accurately as possible, and certain items can even be used in tandem. If you scrawl "cop," then write "donut" and toss the delicious pastry, the officer will run after it. Consider our minds officially blown.

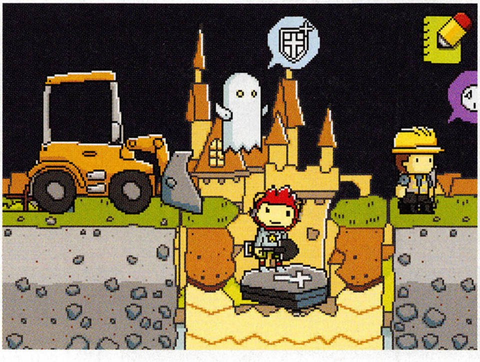


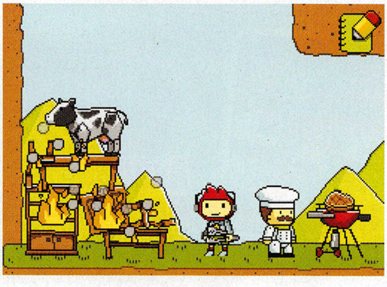
[Above] Doesn't "dragon" seem like it should be the solution to everything?

For players seeking an extra challenge, a golf-inspired par system sets a goal for the number of objects used to complete each level. Scoring under par will unlock new stages (there are more than 100 in total), earn achievements, and reward you with ollars (the game's currency), which you can use to purchase bonus content. To encourage replay and experimentation, any objects you use to finish a level will be locked out for two subsequent playthroughs. You'll "master" a level only after you've beaten it in three completely different ways.

Scribblenauts is slated for a late-2009 release. The game doesn't have a publisher as of press time, but only a fool would write this one off. **—STEVE T.**





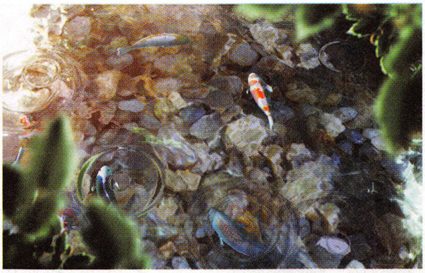


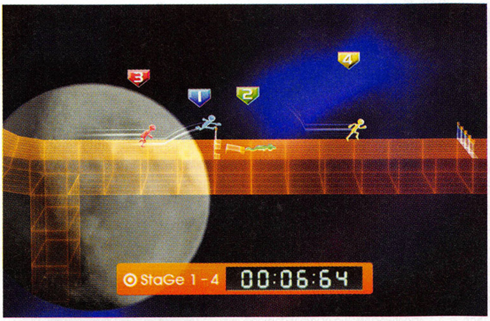
Outside the Box

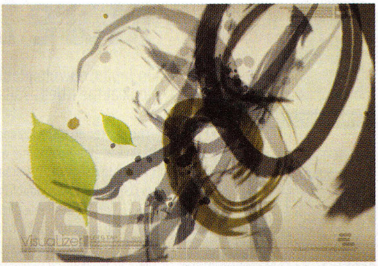
Sega to US gamers: **Let's Tap**! Yuji Naka's peculiar Wii offering heads stateside.

In Japan, Let's Tap was pitched as "the game that even penguins can play." That's because it's the first video game in history (by our reckoning) that you can play without ever touching the controller. Instead, you place the Wii Remote facedown on a box or flat surface, then simply tap with your fingertips, and the controller picks up the vibrations. Four of the game's five play modes were designed with multiplayer in mind, including Rhythm Tap, in which players tap to the beat of 20 different songs, and Tap Runner, a side-scrolling platformer that has you tapping softly to run and harder to jump. The fifth mode—Visualizer—is not so much a game as it is a diversion. It converts your taps into various graphical effects on five unique canvases, including a fireworks display and a gorgeous underwater scene.

Let's Tap will march onto our shores this summer for a suggested retail price of $29.95. It's certainly an audacious start for Yuji Naka's new Prope studio, but the former head of Sonic Team has never shied away from a little experimentation (see NiGHTS, ChuChu Rocket, Billy Hatcher, etc.). **—STEVE T.**





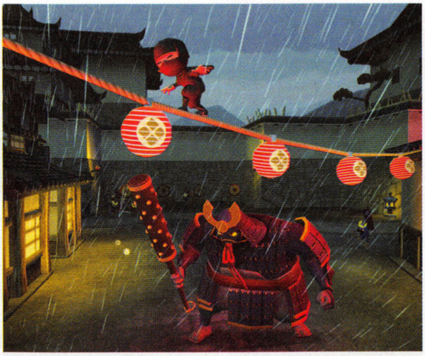


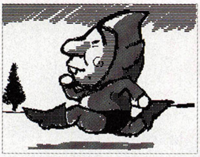
Let's Tap isn't pushing Wii's technical capabilities, but it has a pretty slick aesthetic.

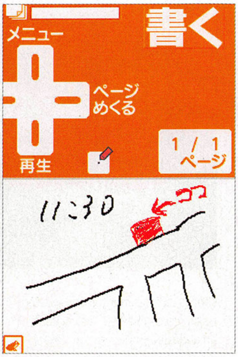
Mini Maul

The developers of Hitman get cute—but stay deadly—with **Mini Ninjas** for Wii and DS.

Don't let the sugar-coma-inducing cuteness of Eidos's Mini Ninjas fool you. Beyond the pastel colors and cartoon smoke lies the shuriken-throwing, sword-slashing action of killthirsty ninjas versus demonic samurai warriors—it's just that they all look like kids dressed up for Halloween. We're not complaining; the game's stylized visuals recall the beautiful imagery found in The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, and that ain't a bad thing. With a developer like Io Interactive—best known for its Mature-rated Hitman series—these adorable assassins are guaranteed to bring the pain. The lil' tykes punish the wicked with Kuji magic and a lethal arsenal of sleeping darts, bombs, throwing stars, and more. And when protagonist Hiro finally reaches his climactic battle with the merciless Samurai Warlord in his Fortress of Doom, have no doubt that stone-cold ninja justice will be served. Be warned, evil samurai—you've got until the games ship this fall to get your affairs in order. **—CHRIS SL.**



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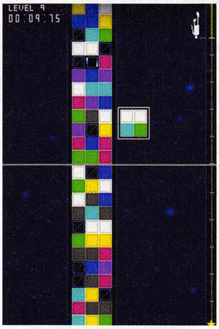
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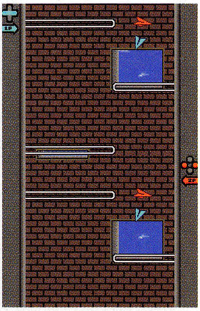
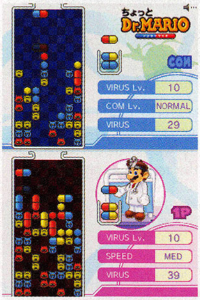


↑ PAPER PLANE

More to Ware

In Japan, downloadable games aren't just for WiiWare. Take a look at the titles available overseas for the DSiWare service.

The Nintendo DSi hit Japan late last year, and shortly afterward, Nintendo released its first batch of DSiWare—downloadable games and programs available through the DSi Shop in exchange for Nintendo Points (which work along the same lines as Wii Points). Available at four price levels (free, 200 points, 500 points, and 800 or more points), and playable only on the Nintendo DSi, DSiWare encompasses a large variety of products and includes several titles familiar to North American audiences, including abbreviated versions of retail releases such as Master of Illusion, Clubhouse Games, Dr. Mario, and two new versions of Brain Age (arts and sciences). Also available are a new installment of WarioWare (which uses the Nintendo DSi camera), and two low-cost quick-play minigames—Birds and Beans (aka Pyoro) and Paper Plane—which were originally featured in the WarioWare series. There are new titles, too; the Art Style puzzle series (previously seen on WiiWare) is delivering two original games in the form of Art Style: Aquario and Art Style: Decode, and an interactive personal planner called Ugomemo—which includes a calendar, an animated doodle pad, and more—is on offer. None of these products have yet been announced for North America. —**CHRIS H.**


ちょっと Dr.MARIO
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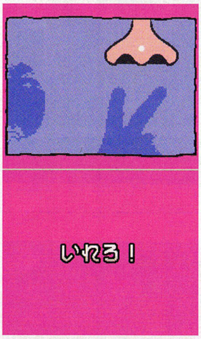
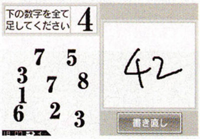
VIRUS 29
1P
VIRUS Lv. 10
SPEED MED
VIRUS 39

↑ DR. MARIO



↑ WARIOWARE PHOTOGRAPHED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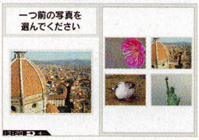
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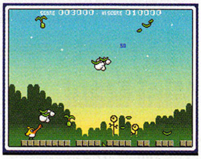
↑ BRAIN AGE: LITERATURE EDITION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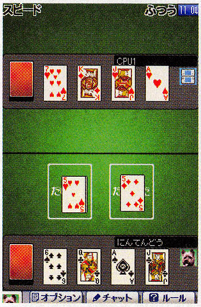
↑ BIRDS AND BEANS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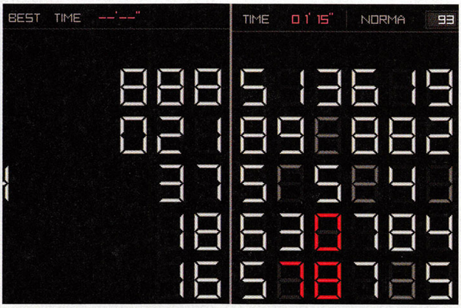
ルール

↑ CLUBHOUSE GAMES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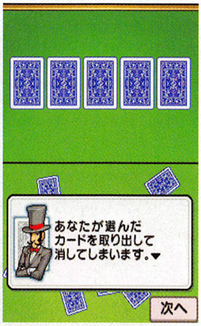
あなたが選んだカードを取り出して消してしまいます。
次へ

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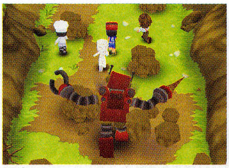
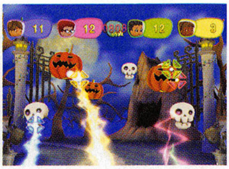
A Small World After All

EA's littlest Sims go big with **MySims Party** and **MySims Racing** for both the DS and Wii.

MySims, the cute, customizable offshoot of EA's 100-million-units-sold Sims behemoth, is spreading from life simulation to tried-and-true family-oriented genres. MySims Party for Wii offers 50 minigames, including a go-go-dancing challenge and a snowboarding trial called Stick the Trick. Competing MySims characters vary in endurance, speed, and luck, making character selection strategic. The DS version proffers a different slate of 40 minigames, such as dinosaur dig Excavate-a-Saurus and the now-required-by-law music minigame: Air Guitar Star.

MySims Racing allows up to four players to take to the track with MySims characters who are armed with power-ups such as heat-seeking jack-o-lanterns. The Wii version is customization-heavy, with choices that range from engines to accessories. The adjustments result in changes to a vehicle's power, acceleration, and handling. The DS version gives us both local wireless play and Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection-enabled multiplayer racing. Look for all of the new MySims titles to come around the bend sometime this year. **—GEORGE S.**

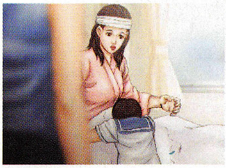


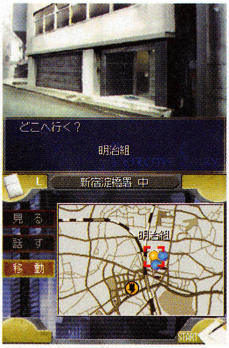


A More Effective Detective

Jake Hunter returns to DS with all-new cases and enhanced old ones.

It's not often that a publisher is able to listen to customer feedback on a game that missed the mark and give it a second chance at success, but that's exactly what's happening with the adventures of Aksys Games's no-nonsense detective Jake Hunter. Scheduled for release in the second quarter of 2009, Jake Hunter Detective Story: Memories of the Past features not only three new point-and-click crime-solving episodes (including one that lets you play as three characters with differing perspectives), but all three episodes from the game's 2008 predecessor, Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles. The three returning cases aren't just simple re-releases; they've received a completely new translation, which should provide the game world and its characters with some much-needed personality, atmosphere, and humor. "The original release of Jake Hunter was more of a straight translation, which left it sounding a little flat," says Memories of the Past editor Ben Bateman. "In the localization of Memories of the Past, we've made an effort to imbue Jake and company with a little more personality and flavor. We've taken the idea of an atmospheric noir detective story and run with it as best we can." In addition to six full episodes, Jake Hunter Detective Story includes unlockable "Jake Hunter Unleashed!" chibi-style comics and other bonus content. **—CHRIS H.**





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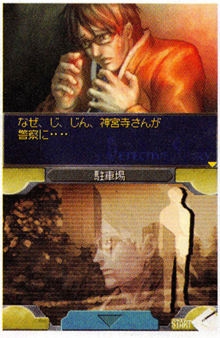

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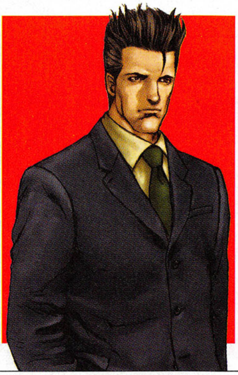
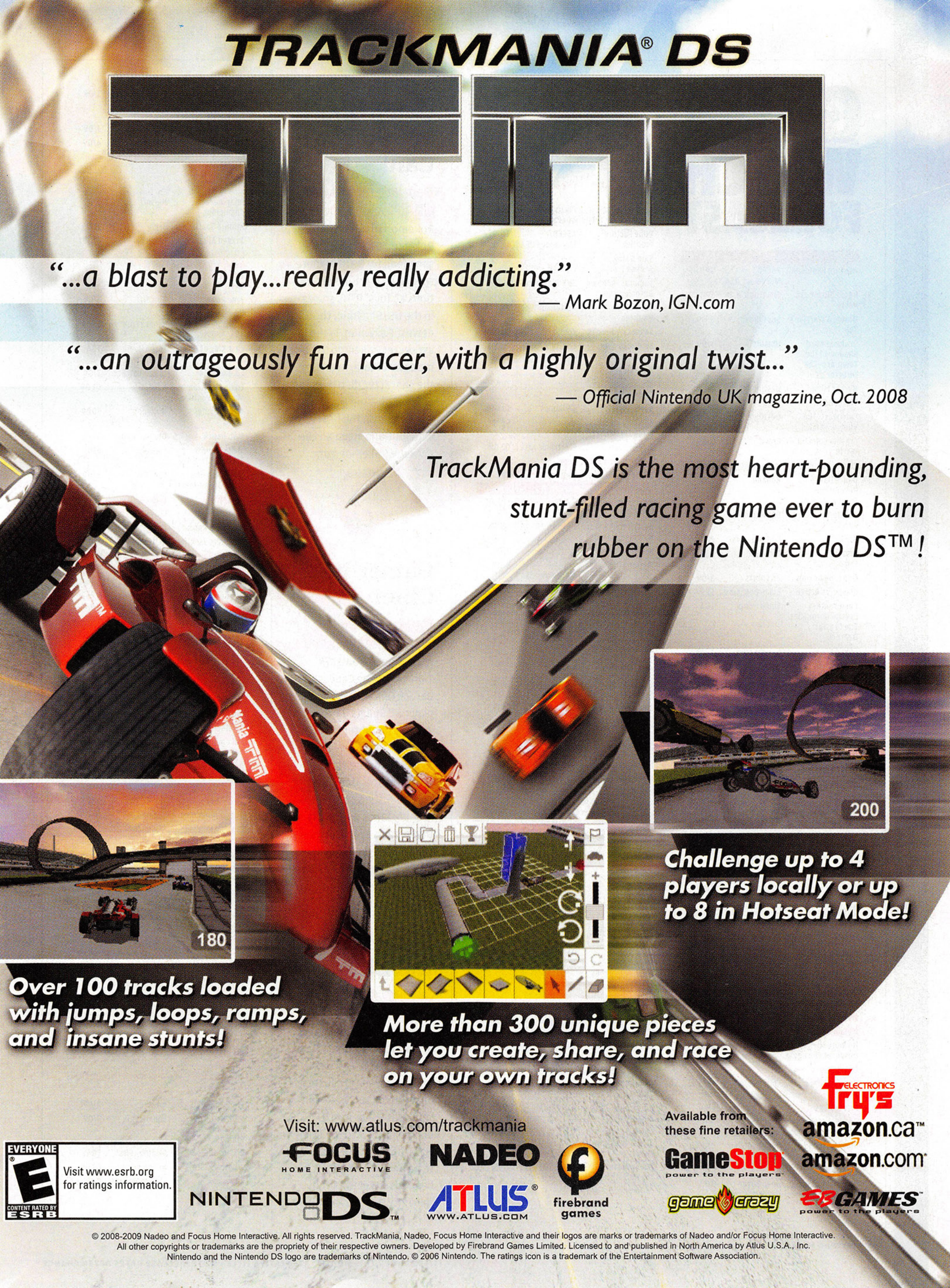


Net Gains

We can thank Sega for bringing to market the first game we all thought of when learning of the Wii MotionPlus accessory. **Virtua Tennis 2009**, developed by English studio Sumo Digital, will be among the first titles to use the new technology, giving you the opportunity to show off your perfect backhand. The Virtua Tennis series has always included top pros such as Roger Federer, Maria Sharapova, and Raphael Nadal; this year the roster has been expanded to include awesome newcomers Andy Murray and Ana Ivanovic, among others. And to add international flavor, you'll get to play in your own Davis Cup competition. Take to the courts this May. **—CHRIS SH.**



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GAME WATCH FORECAST

Wii

Arc Rise Fantasia	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	SPR 09
Boom Blox: Bash Party	Electronic Arts	SPR 09
Brave: A Warrior's Tale	SouthPeak	3/09
Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars—The Director's Cut	Ubisoft	3/09
Burger Island	Destineer	3/09
The Conduit	Sega	SPR 09
Cate West: The Vanishing Files	Destineer	3/09
Crayola Colorful World	Crave	3/09
Cursed Mountain	Deep Silver	2009
Dance Dance Revolution: Disney Grooves	Konami	3/09
The Destiny of Zorro	505 Games	TBA
DiRT 2*	Codemasters	2009
Disaster: Day of Crisis	Nintendo	TBA
Don King Boxing	2K Sports	3/09
EA Sports Active	Electronic Arts	SPR 09
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearers	Square Enix	TBA
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	Square Enix	3/09
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	Atari	6/09
Guitar Hero: Metallica	Activision	5/09
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	7/09
Help Wanted	Hudson	SUM 09
Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings	LucasArts	SPR 09
Indoor Sports	Konami	TBA
Klonoa	Namco Bandai	Q2 09
Let's Tap	Sega	SUM 09
Little King's Story	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	5/09
MadWorld	Sega	3/09
Major Minor's Majestic March	Majesco	3/09
Marble Saga: Kororinpa	Hudson	SPR 09
Mini Ninjas	Eidos	FALL 09
Monster Pals	Crave	3/09
Monsters vs. Aliens	Activision	3/09
MotoGP	Capcom	3/09
Muramasa: The Demon Blade	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	2nd Half 09
MySims Party	Electronic Arts	3/09
MySims Racing	Electronic Arts	2009
No More Heroes: Desperate Struggle	TBA	2010
Our House	Majesco	2009
Overlord Dark Legend	Codemasters	1st Half 09
Pirateology	Codemasters	TBA
Pirates vs. Ninjas Dodgeball	SouthPeak	3/09
Play the World	DreamCatcher	3/09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	Konami	2009
Professor Heinz Wolff's Gravity	Deep Silver	3/09
Punch-Out!!	Nintendo	TBA
Puzzle Kingdoms	Zoo Games	Q1 09
Pyroblazer	TBA	TBA
Ready 2 Rumble Revolution	Atari	3/09
Real Heroes: Firefighter	Conspiracy	Q2 09
Redneck Chicken Riot	City Interactive	Q2 09
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Rune Factory Frontier	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	3/09
Sam & Max Season Two	Atari	2009
Samurai Shodown Anthology	SNK Playmore	2009
Sin and Punishment 2	Nintendo	2009
Skate City Heroes	Zoo	Q1 09
Spyborgs	Capcom	2009
Story Hour Adventures	Zoo	2009
Story Hour Fairy Tales	Zoo	2009
Super PickUps	XS Games	Q1 09
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*	Ubisoft	9/09
Trivial Pursuit	Electronic Arts	Q2 09
Virtua Tennis 2009	Sega	5/09
Wii Sports Resort	Nintendo	SPR 09

NINTENDO DS

Again: Eye of Providence	Tecmo	SPR 09
American Popstar: Road to Celebrity	Ubisoft	3/09
Animal Planet	Activision	3/09
Avalon Code	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	3/09
Blood Bowl	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Brave: Shaman's Challenge	SouthPeak	3/09
Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars—The Director's Cut	Ubisoft	3/09
Chicken Hunter Star Karts	MumboJumbo	3/09
The Dark Spire	Atlus	3/09
de Blob	THQ	Q2 09
DinoPets	Destineer	3/09
DiRT 2*	Codemasters	2009
Disciples II	Strategy First	TBA
Don King Boxing	2K Sports	3/09
Doodle Hex	TBA	TBA
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Reverie	Square Enix	TBA
Dragon Master	DreamCatcher	4/09
Drama Queens	Majesco	SPR 09
Dreamer: Top Model	DreamCatcher	3/09
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Chain Reaction	Deep Silver	2009
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Critical Mass	Deep Silver	10/09
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Proving Grounds	Deep Silver	2009
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	Square Enix	3/09
Flower, Sun, and Rain	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	3/09
Gardening Mama	Majesco	3/09
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	Atari	6/09
Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	Rockstar	Q2 09
Guitar Hero Modern Hits	Activision	3/09
The Hardy Boys: Treasure on the Tracks	Sega	SPR 09
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	7/09
Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure	Electronic Arts	3/09
Hot 'n' Cold	Majesco	3/09
The Humans	Deep Silver	4/09
I Love Beauty: Hollywood Superstar Makeover	City Interactive	Q2 09
Imagine Ice Champions	Ubisoft	3/09
Infinite Space	Sega	2009
Jagged Alliance	Empire	4/09
Jake Hunter Detective Story: Memories of the Past	Aksys	Q2 09
Jake Power Handyman	Ubisoft	3/09
Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days	Square Enix	2009
Last King of Africa	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Learn Chess	DreamCatcher	3/09
Little Magician's Magic Adventure	Konami	Q1 09
Mario & Luigi RPG 3*	Nintendo	2009
Matchstick	DreamCatcher	3/09
Mega Man Star Force 3: Black Ace	Capcom	8/09
Mega Man Star Force 3: Red Joker	Capcom	8/09
Mini Ninjas	Eidos	FALL 09
Monster Pals	Crave	3/09
Monsters Racers	Koei	2009
Monsters vs. Aliens	Activision	3/09
MySims Party	Electronic Arts	3/09
MySims Racing	Electronic Arts	2009
Overlord Minions	Codemasters	1st Half 09
Paint by DS	DreamCatcher	3/09
Peggle: Dual Shot	PopCap	3/09
Personal Trainer: Walking	Nintendo	2009
Pet Vet Down Under	Deep Silver	TBA
Phantasy Star 0	Sega	FALL 09
Pimp My Ride 2	Activision	3/09
Pirate Battle	Orbital Media	TBA
Pirateology	Codemasters	TBA
Pokémon Platinum Version	Nintendo	3/09
Professor Heinz Wolff's Gravity	Deep Silver	3/09
Puffins: Island Adventure	Majesco	SPR 09
Puzzle Kingdoms	Zoo Games	Q1 09
Rhythm Heaven	Nintendo	1st Half 09
Roogoo	SouthPeak	4/09
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Sands of Destruction	Sega	SUM 09
Sarah: Keeper of the Unicorn	DreamCatcher	3/09
Scrabble	Electronic Arts	3/09
Scribblenauts	TBA	Q4 09
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor	Atlus	SUM 09
Steal Princess	Atlus	3/09
Suikoden: Tierkreis	Konami	3/09
Super Robot Taisen OG Saga: Endless Frontier	Atlus	4/09
Sushi Academy	City Interactive	Q2 09
Tokyo Beat Down	Atlus	3/09
TrackMania DS	Atlus	3/09
Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume	Square Enix	3/09
Warlords DS	Strategy First	TBA
A Witch's Tale	NIS America	Q1 09
Zubo	Electronic Arts	3/09

RED TEXT = TITLES ADDED THIS MONTH *TENTATIVE TITLE NOTE: RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE

BITS OF TID

Catch 'Em While You Can!

More Pokémon character distributions on the way.

Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl fans can soon look forward to more special character distributions at Toys"R"Us stores in the US. Shaymin, the newest Pokémon, is the latest secret Pokémon to be made available, following the character distributions of Manaphy and Darkrai. For details on the next distributions, keep an eye on www.Pokemon.com.

Gamer-in-Chief

The leader of the free world joins the Wii craze.

According to *New York Times* blog The Caucus, Barack Obama occasionally plays Wii Sports bowling with his daughters, who received the console as a Christmas gift last year. The president, who famously struggled on the real-life lanes during the Democratic primaries, says he fares better in the video game. Now the White House just needs a subscription to Nintendo Power.

Return of the Blob

The revival of A Boy and His Blob is back on track.

A few years ago a remake of classic NES game A Boy and His Blob was slated for release on DS courtesy of Majesco (and was even shown at E3) before it disappeared into the ether. Now the revival is rumored to be back on schedule, but headed to Wii. Hopefully this time the blob solidifies.

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Which is the greater threat to the universe: evil pastries or buglike aliens? Upcoming WiiWare shooters let you battle both.

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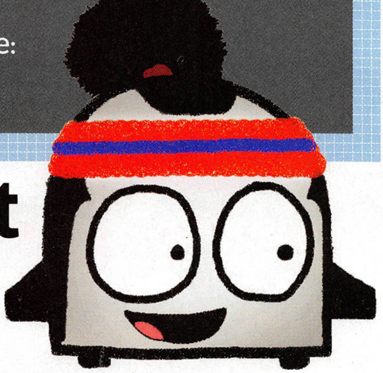


Toasters Fight with Honor!

Get ready for one of WiiWare's craziest (and potentially coolest) games yet: **Eduardo the Samurai Toaster.**

Gamers are used to some pretty strange heroes. Plumbers. Talking hedgehogs. Intergalactic foxes. In early 2009, one of the strangest will be coming to WiiWare: Eduardo the Samurai Toaster. That's right, he's a toaster. And a samurai. And his gaming debut—a four-player side-scrolling 2-D shooter in the vein of Metal Slug and Gunstar Heroes, appropriately titled Eduardo the Samurai Toaster—could be one of the most exciting things to happen to WiiWare. With a title like that, how could it not be?

Created by indie developer Semnat Studios, Eduardo the Samurai Toaster is equal parts action and style. Using either the Wii Remote (held sideways like an NES pad) or the Classic Controller, players will be able to run, shoot, and throw their way through 13 stages featuring wave after wave of anthropomorphic food-based enemies. The action takes Eduardo through bamboo forests and into fiery volcanoes, and the gameplay is as varied as the environments; some levels offer traditional side-scrolling run-'n'-gun action (well, as traditional as it gets when you're a samurai toaster), while others put Eduardo and his allies into rocketpacks and unfold like outer-space shooters. Another level features a vertically scrolling playfield. Along the way, you'll power up with five types of colorful pastry-themed weapons that essentially fill the roles of an assault rifle, a spread gun, a shotgun, a flak cannon, and a homing missile.

Additionally, the game features some of the most unique visuals on Wii: hand-drawn graphics created using a variety of artistic styles give each level a distinct look. To find out more about this bizarre—and, we hope, awesome—title, we tracked down Semnat co-owner Daniel Coleman (also the game's director, artist, and level designer) to find out more about the way of the toaster. **—CHRIS H.**

NINTENDO POWER **What makes Eduardo the Samurai Toaster ideal for WiiWare?**

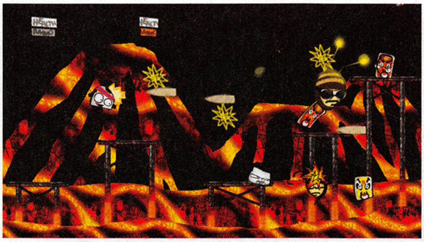
DANIEL COLEMAN Nintendo is very supportive of small developers such as ourselves, and they gave us the creative freedom to make something as odd as Eduardo. And while the motion controls are a key feature of Wii games, I feel the system has gone beyond the point where it's just about the controller. Wii is the most successful home console this generation, and Nintendo has managed to reach out to people who would normally stay far away from games. It's a cultural phenomenon at this point, and WiiWare is a terrific chance for small developers to make it big. The most important thing for us is the creative freedom allowed with WiiWare development.

Why did you choose to make the main character a toaster?

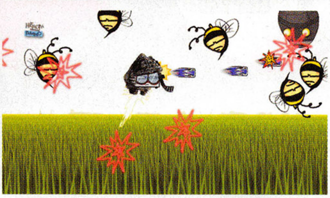
That came from a random, silly idea I had written in an email to [cocreator] Robert [DeMaria]. It was spontaneous, the whole toaster thing. This was over four years ago, and I was especially into nonsense comedy like *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* at the time. Random humor.

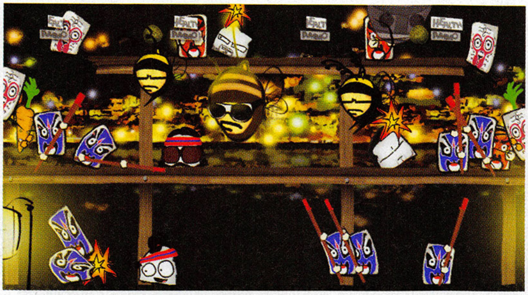
I understand the name Eduardo comes from a friend of yours. Why did you pick that particular name?

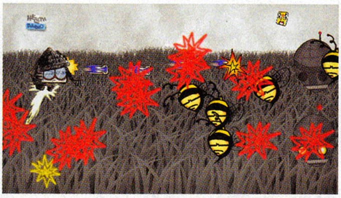
In part it was a reaction to the names that most game protagonists have. They either have fantastical fantasy and sci-fi names, or typical American action-hero names. That's just fine and to be expected, but if nothing else I thought it would be nice for a game protagonist to have



[Below] Where do samurai toasters get jetpacks? We don't know, but we're kinda jealous.







[Left] Beware the dreaded Peking Opera pastries!

a common Brazilian name (and a common name in many countries all over the world).

What makes him a samurai? Especially since he's shooting, which doesn't seem very samurai-like?
Ha ha, very true. If I remember correctly, he became a samurai after I revised the character design. I recall fooling around with different ideas for the character and one of them had him sporting a traditional samurai topknot. The big bushy topknot was inspired by the samurai movie classic *Shogun's Samurai*, where Sonny Chiba's character has a similar hairdo. And several areas of the game were inspired by scenes from my favorite samurai flicks, including the big finale level that is based upon the finale of my all-time favorite movie, *Seven Samurai*. How that level looks now probably won't trigger that association in most people's minds when they take a look at it, but if I pointed out examples the similarities would be more evident. But it's definitely the more abstract interpretation I did for the game.

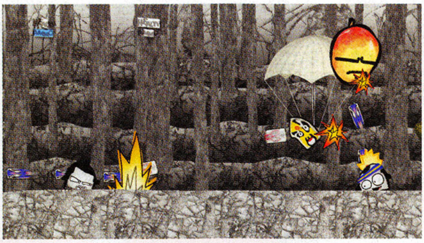
Are the other characters in multiplayer also Eduardo, or do they have their own names?
They're each a different character, but I haven't actually named them. All three of the others are also based on characters from movies, but I don't know if I can [be specific]. Two are based on popular samurai movie icons and one is based on a character from a movie where I took the kickin' sweatband from. That's all I feel safe to say.

What was the idea behind the visual style, and the distinct look of each level? How did you create the visuals?
Well in the very first version of Eduardo, known then as Eduardo the Magical Toaster, I didn't know what I was doing. We were working with a tile system, back when it was a java game. And I had no idea how to create good tiles. I first went for a realistic grass look, then later more stylized tiles based on the Yoshi's Island's tile set. (I've found that other amateur developers have done similar things when they first start making games.) I later realized that I didn't necessarily have to do what other games did, and over the years I experimented more and more with terrain, middleground assets, and parallax layers, until I found my own method of asset creation. Since we've been working on versions of Eduardo for so many years, I had a lot of time to experiment with the art. I got braver, I acquired new skills from my college art classes, and I learned to think a bit more outside the box. Or at least outside the box I used to be in.

In terms of process, as I experimented with various methods of asset creation I used a variety of mediums. The level in the courtyard, for instance, has assets created from a mix of charcoal and acrylic paint. Some levels were done entirely in programs like Dogwaffle—most of the early assets I did. I used India ink, charcoal, and acrylic inks on Mylar extensively for the final level. The middleground assets for that level were done in pen. I also had some fun creating middleground textures, experimenting in Photoshop by combining patterns I made with ink, paints, and so on. One level has textures from some simple prints that I made, though it's perhaps not very recognizable as such. The limitations of file size are definitely a restriction, so I can't do everything that I'd like to. I could easily work with dozens of gigabytes of data. I'd love to make a game with no repeated textures or assets, everything being unique. One giant series of drawings. That's the dream.

Why did you make the game a shooter? What do you like about the genre?
When Eduardo was more of a platformer there were still shooter elements, and as we looked at what worked well in that game we realized that emphasizing that aspect and putting it into the run-'n'-gun genre would greatly benefit the title, which thankfully has turned out to be the case. I'm a fan of those pick-up-and-play action games where the screen is being flooded with enemies and your hands get sweaty from the nonstop action. Our team wanted to create something very energetic, to really ramp up the level of action while keeping the gameplay balanced.

What are the bosses like, and how do the battles play out?
Since we're such a small developer, we had to decide early on in development what to use our limited resources for. Instead of devoting several months to create big-event boss battles, we decided to focus on creating various small- and medium-sized enemy types that could be arranged in a diverse amount of situations to keep battles fresh and interesting. We've also used volume, so these large events where you have to battle waves of enemies have taken the place of the traditional single, large boss battle. We were concerned at first if this was going to be enough, but after a while we found that fighting waves of dozens of enemies was extremely satisfying. We have stop points, autoscrolling areas that move around a level, and a finale that we're very proud of. These events give the effect of a boss battle while allowing the player to use all of the skills they've developed throughout the game but in a far more intense and demanding situation. I think that when gamers experience these battles they'll be quite satisfied.

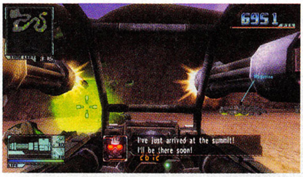


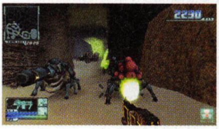
It's a Bug Hunt

Do your part to exterminate cybernetic bugs in **Onslaught**, the first FPS for WiiWare.

There's something for almost everyone on WiiWare, but oddly there have been no first-person shooters. Thankfully, Hudson is addressing this situation with Onslaught, an FPS that's all about blasting wave after wave of giant insects. See, cybernetic bugs were developed to somehow make distant planets habitable. Things didn't quite work out as planned, though, and you now find yourself on a planet infested by creepy crawlers filled with acidic juices. (If you get hit by some spray, you have to shake the Nunchuk to wipe the green liquid off, or you'll start losing health.) Sure, the premise is derivative, but it's also cheesy in a good way.

Onslaught is entirely mission-based (reach your base in 30 minutes, for example), and offers about a dozen levels in all. Obviously, to get through these missions alive you'll need some firepower. Unlike some games that go overboard in the armaments department, though, Onslaught offers a manageable number of weapons: a machine gun, an assault rifle, a shotgun, and a rocket launcher (each of which is assigned to a different direction on the Control Pad), as well a laser whip for close encounters (press Z), and grenades (press C). But you're not a one-person army—you have a couple AI troopers at your disposal (you can order them to face front, back, or to the sides by pressing A), or you can squash some insects with human allies via the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. —JUSTIN C.

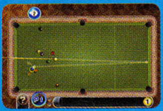




[Above] Why run and gun when you can drive and gun?

EVALUATION STATION

WiiWare



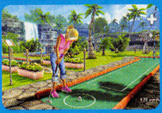
CUE SPORTS: POOL REVOLUTION

PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
GENRE: **SPORTS**
Wii POINTS: **500**

Though Pool Revolution doesn't have Midnight Pool's billiards-hall style and grasp of the vernacular, it is the most balanced pool game on Wii. The overhead and table-level views are helpful, and arrows that show trajectories are informative without making every shot a no-brainer. Four game variations, checklists of optional rules, and online play add much to the mix. —GEORGE S.

Recommended

WiiWare



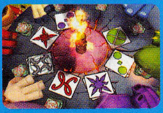
FUN! FUN! MINIGOLF

PUBLISHER: **SHIN'EN**
GENRE: **SPORTS**
Wii POINTS: **900**

You might be suspicious of how enjoyable a game is when the publisher feels the need to put "Fun!" in the title twice, but Fun! Fun! Minigolf is actually quite good. Featuring solid play mechanics and 27 holes on three courses, FFM provides a quality pick-up-and-play experience, and the graphics are some of the best on WiiWare. Although the courses could be more exciting, the game's got it where it counts. —CHRIS H.

Recommended

WiiWare



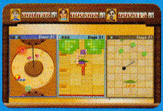
JUNGLE SPEED

PUBLISHER: **PLAYFUL ENTERTAINMENT**
GENRE: **CARD GAME**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

Jungle Speed could be a fun party game—it supports eight players—but it falls completely flat when you're playing alone. The AI is extremely uneven, with the Novice level being far too easy and the Expert and Master levels being inhumanly tough. The music and sound effects are annoying, too. The game's only value comes from when you have four or more players, but there are better multiplayer games out there. —TOM H.

Grumble Grumble

WiiWare



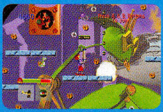
MABOSHI'S ARCADE

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **ACTION/PUZZLE**
Wii POINTS: **800**

This collection of three parlor-style minigames has some cool ancillary features—the option to download it to your DS or to play split-screen with friends and have your actions affect their playfields—but I found the core mechanics to be completely uninspired. It's not much to look at, either, and all of the activities are brutally difficult. As simple diversions go, the Art Style games are much better. —STEVE T.

Grumble Grumble

WiiWare



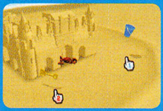
PLANET PACHINKO

PUBLISHER: **ALLIED KINGDOMS**
GENRE: **ACTION**
Wii POINTS: **500**

I have to say, initially I was impressed by Planet Pachinko's weirdness. The story (take control of a family of robots and destroy pachinko balls to find your missing dog) is certainly original, and the dialogue is humorous. The gameplay is chaotic and unfocused, however; strategy seems far less important than how fast you can mash buttons. Spend your 500 points elsewhere. —TOM H.

Grumble Grumble

WiiWare



SANDY BEACH

PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
GENRE: **SIMULATION**
Wii POINTS: **500**

If you ever wanted to build elaborate castles out of sand but didn't have the skill or patience, you'll get your chance with Sandy Beach. As a sand-castle-building sim, the game does its job; it's fairly easy to use, and you have a decent selection of creative options. However, that's pretty much all there is to the title. The crab-battle minigame is nothing special, so check this one out only if you want to unleash your inner architect. —CHRIS H.

Hmmm...

WiiWare

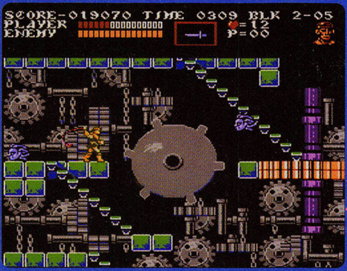
TIKI TOWERS

PUBLISHER: **REALARCADE**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
Wii POINTS: **500**

Tiki Towers is essentially World of Goo, only with monkeys instead of goo balls. Building stuff with bamboo stalks to get one of the monkeys to the goal is fun, and the various power-ups (which you can use to defend your structures from attacking enemies) add some strategy. Sadly, Tiki Towers doesn't look as good and isn't as charming as World of Goo, but you do get some of the same basic experience for one-third the price. –**JUSTIN C.**

Recommended

Virtual Console



CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE

PLATFORM: **NES** • PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
GENRE: **ACTION** • ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1990**

Chris Sl's Pick

If you ask me, the third and last NES Castlevania is the series' best. It builds on the classic side-scrolling, whip-cracking action of the original with multiple playable characters and various branching paths to explore on the way to the big showdown with Dracula. Plus, it has some of the rockingest NES tunes thanks to Konami's signature 8-bit bass.

Recommended

Virtual Console

KIRBY'S DREAM LAND 3

PLATFORM: **SUPER NES**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **ACTION**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1997**

Kirby's Dream Land 3 may not have the cachet of some of the other Kirby titles, but I find it just as enjoyable as the rest. Kirby's animal allies and his pal Gooey (who can be controlled by either the computer or one of your buddies; I prefer the latter) help freshen up the usual Kirby formula. I definitely recommend that all fans of the franchise pick this one up. –**JUSTIN C.**

Recommended

Virtual Console

They've been turned into stone!

PHANTASY STAR IV

PLATFORM: **SEGA GENESIS** • PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
GENRE: **RPG** • ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1995**

Casey L's Pick

The outside-developed Phantasy Star III made a mess of the series, but the spurned developers of the first two games did not despair. Given the reins again, they made a masterpiece of a finale that tied together the entire series and gave Phantasy Star fans the closure they yearned for. Phantasy Star IV plays like earlier installments, but is longer, prettier, and tells a much more sophisticated story—one that even players new to the series should enjoy.

Recommended

Virtual Console

ZODA'S REVENGE: STARTROPICS II

PLATFORM: **NES** • PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **ADVENTURE** • ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1994**

George S's Pick

The original StarTropics introduced gamers to the Zelda-inspired adventures of everykid Mike Jones. The sequel improves on its predecessor with many control refinements. The dialogue is fairly cornball, but the story is fun and the gameplay dishes out nonstop action peppered with well-designed puzzles and fairly challenging boss battles.

Recommended

WANTED!

When it comes to NeoGeo games on Virtual Console, the readers went with the safe choice—the third installment of the venerable Metal Slug series. The NP staff pick is anything but safe; Pulstar is slick but brutally hard. Both groups, however, agreed that classic shooter Nam-1975 and fighting game The Last Blade 2 are musts for Virtual Console.

READERS' MOST WANTED: NEOGEO

1 Metal Slug 3
2 Mutation Nation
3 Nam-1975
4 The Super Spy
5 The Last Blade 2

NP STAFF'S MOST WANTED: NEOGEO

1 Pulstar
2 Garou: Mark of the Wolves
3 Nam-1975
4 The Last Blade 2
5 Twinkle Star Sprites

Next issue we'll reveal the most in-demand games for the Nintendo 64, and after that we'll open the gates for an all-system free-for-all. Send your top five picks for any system currently represented on Virtual Console to **vcpoll@nintendopower.com** and we'll print the results in an upcoming issue. Note: This is for polling purposes only and will in no way determine future Virtual Console releases.

THIS MONTH IN PREVIEWS

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SUPER ROBOT TAISEN OG SAGA: ENDLESS FRONTIER PG. 24
TOKYO BEAT DOWN PG. 29

Pokémon Springs Eternal

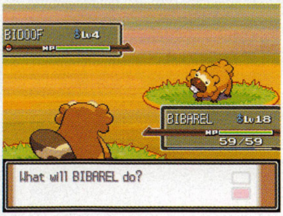
>POKÉMON PLATINUM VERSION

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **GAME FREAK** • RELEASE: **MARCH 2009**

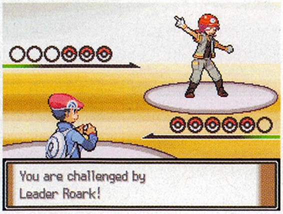
The normal rules of time and space don't apply in Pokémon Platinum Version, this spring's follow-up to Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl versions. At least that's true of the game's Distortion World, where Trainers enter a topsy-turvy, puzzle-filled maze on their way to confront the Origin Forme of Giratina. That's just one of the new, altered, or upgraded aspects of Pokémon Platinum. As Pokémon fans well know, each chapter in the Pokémon saga appears in three versions—two versions that launch together, such as Red and Blue, Gold and Silver, Ruby and Sapphire, and Diamond and Pearl—and a third version that includes new functionality and refinements, story variations, and in the case of Platinum, Forme changes for Giratina, and the newly discovered Pokémon, Shaymin, that offer Trainers exciting new battle possibilities. Giratina's Origin Forme allows the Pokémon to levitate and avoid ground-based attacks. And Shaymin gains a Sky Forme that gives it a dual-type (Grass-and-Flying) advantage.

Beyond these powerful Pokémon, the Platinum version is packed with reasons for Pokémon fans to check it out, whether they've played Pokémon Diamond and Pearl or not. For starters, the new Wi-Fi Plaza invites players into a virtual Pokémon amusement park with up to 20 people from around the world. The Global Trade Station has been renovated and is now the Global Terminal with added functionality, and players will also be able to upload battle videos using the new VS. Recorder. The Battle Frontier (introduced in Pokémon Emerald) also returns with new arenas and challenges.

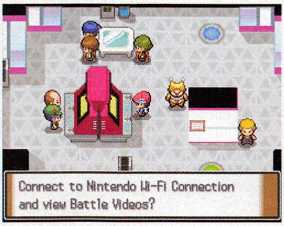
Your adventure now takes place in the Sinnoh region's snowy winter and several twists and new characters have been added to help smooth out some of the plot wrinkles from Pokémon Diamond and Pearl. We'll have even more Pokémon Platinum revelations for you in our feature next month. —SCOTT P.



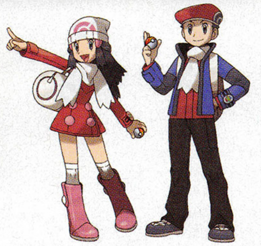
What will BIBAREL do?



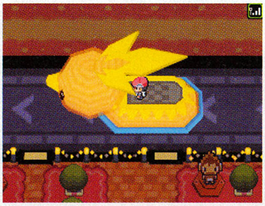
You are challenged by Leader Roark!

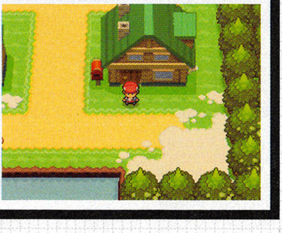


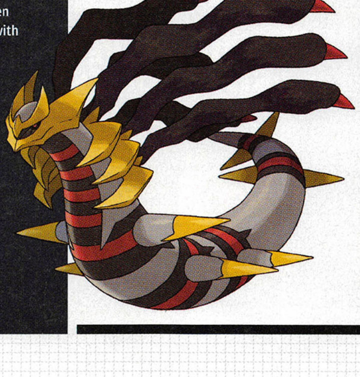
Connect to Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection and view Battle Videos?



[Right] Two new characters join the story, each with their own mysterious agenda.







Belly of the Beast

>MARIO & LUIGI RPG 3

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **ALPHADREAM** • RELEASE: **2009**

Since our peek at this highly anticipated sequel last issue, we've gotten our white-gloved hands on brand-new screens and info (all of which come from a Japanese version of the game, so some details might change before the title's North American release).

First, a quick recap: while helping Princess Peach investigate a mysterious illness that's swept over her kingdom, Mario and Luigi are shrunk and swallowed by Bowser, using his new vacuum ability. Once inside the cranky Koopa king, the bros discover they can sometimes control him by doing certain things, such as hammering a nerve. Bowser's actions in the outside world are generally shown on the top screen while Mario and Luigi's adventure inside his body is displayed on the bottom. The A Button controls Mario, B is for Luigi, and X and Y are assigned to Bowser, giving the player control of the full cast.

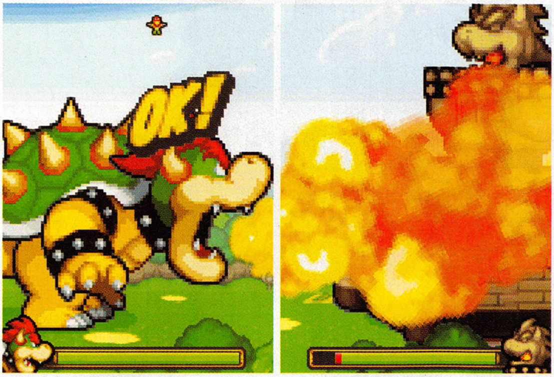
We now know that Fawful—the hilarious fan-favorite villain from Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga—is somehow behind it all; he takes over the kingdom and sends his minion, Metabos, to fight Bowser.

Additionally, we know that, upon entering the body of his mortal enemy, Mario meets a cute little guy named Yellow Star, who acts as his guide. Help is also available from Hemoglobins, which are floating blocks that offer tips. After Mario locates his brother (who landed in another part of Bowser's body), the duo explores Bowser's depths. They'll come across other characters that are trapped in there with them, such as longtime pal and Kart companion Toad, who apparently makes the most of his stay by setting up a shop.

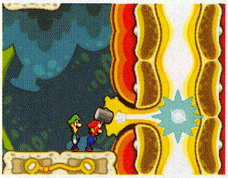
As in the series' two previous titles, our heroes can collect items and badges that grant special abilities. They also learn special combo attacks in which well-timed button presses result in extra hits; two examples are the Green Shell attack, in which the bros kick a shell back and forth at their enemy, and the Sweet Basket, which rains treats down into Luigi's open gullet until he's ballooned to many times his size.

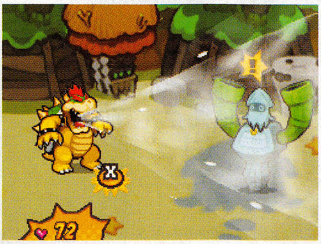
The game's bizarre setup is sure to make for some unique and clever gameplay. For example, sometimes Bowser will vacuum up enemies during battle, which will then attack Mario and Luigi inside Bowser's body. Also, the many hardware features of the DS will be used. Some Bowser battles require you to turn the DS sideways to hold it like a book, and then swipe the stylus to throw a punch, and blow on the microphone to breathe fire.

With so many fun new ideas plus the funny dialogue, crafty puzzles, and snappy turn-based battles that the series is known for, Mario & Luigi RPG 3 is easily one of the biggest DS games on the horizon. —**CHRIS SL.**

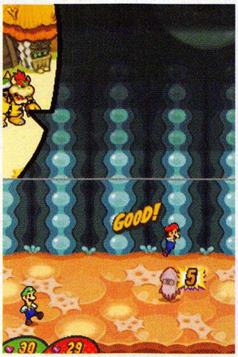


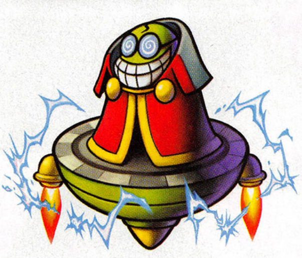
[Above] With the DS held sideways, blowing into the mic breathes fire.



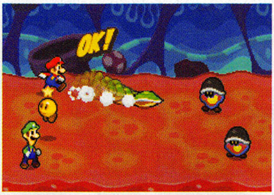


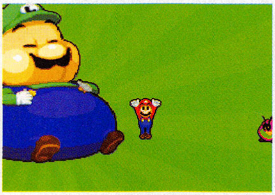
[Above left and left] Mario strikes a nerve. (Note: All screens are of the Japanese version.)





[Above] After Bowser vacuums in the squid, the bros have to take it on. [Left] Fan-favorite Fawful returns!





Super Robot Reunion

>SUPER ROBOT TAISEN OG SAGA: ENDLESS FRONTIER

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **MONOLITH SOFT** • RELEASE: **APRIL 2009**

Despite what the title says, this game doesn't have much to do with the rest of the Super Robot Taisen series. It's not a turn-based strategy sim, and it's relatively low on robot content—of the giant-walking-war-machine kind, anyway, and those are the robots that usually stand front and center in the Robot Taisen games.

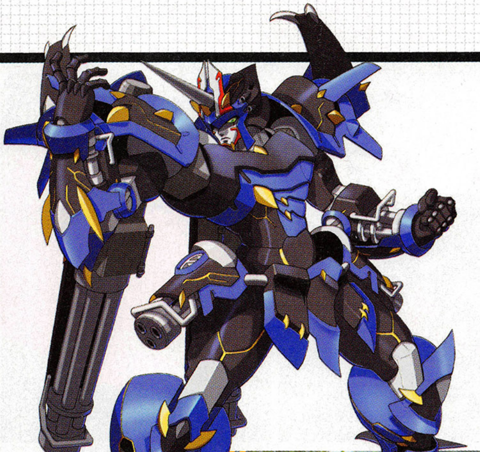
What the series has been about since the very beginning, though, is crossing over characters who were never meant to meet each other. The very first Robot Taisen games, way back in the 8-bit days, mixed up lots of different characters from popular Japanese cartoon shows. This Robot Taisen title is made by Monolith Soft, developer of the Xenosaga series, so it mashes up a crew of original characters—the "OG" stands for "Original Generation"—with the heroines from Monolith's other sci-fi RPGs.

There's no need to have played Xenosaga to get the hang of this game, but if you have played it, you'll recognize some of the gameplay elements in Endless Frontier. Like the Xeno games, this is a traditional RPG with a fast-moving, action-tinged combat system. When it comes to style and tone, though, the two couldn't be farther apart. Endless Frontier isn't weighed down with pretentious dialogue and pointless religious symbolism. The script is breezy, witty, and never even thinks about taking itself seriously.

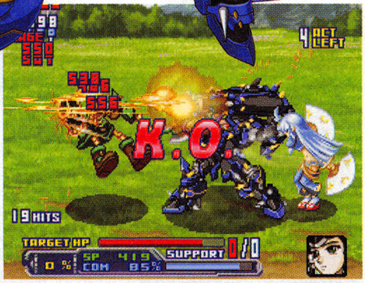
In the early going, the story's mainly a mechanism for throwing together as many colorful sci-fi characters as possible. There's an interdimensional bounty hunter in retro-future cowboy getup, his busty android sidekick and her split personality, an even more generously endowed alien princess, and a furry cat-person in a fore-and-aft cap—and that's just who shows up in the very first dungeon.

Nothing about the character designs is subtle, but they look great during Infinite Frontier's combat scenes, where huge sprites trade blows in almost-real-time action. In the same vein as the Xeno series, the heroes and their enemies take turns attacking, but when a character's on offense, you trigger their moves with timed presses of the face buttons. Setting up the appropriate chains of different attacks and timing their execution deals huge amounts of extra damage—and even if you don't tweak the details just so, the attack animations are still great fun to watch.

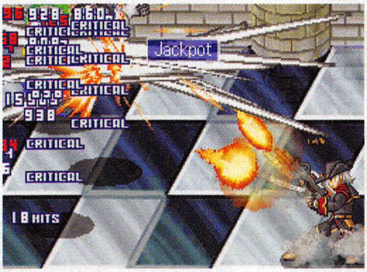
Endless Frontier doesn't promise to be a work of staggering literary genius. It does look like fun, though—off-the-wall science-fiction futures aren't usually what we get to visit in DS RPGs—and it's coming very soon. Look out for it to debut on this side of the Pacific in the spring. **—DAVID S.**

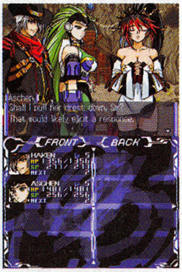


The robots don't take center stage like they used to, but it still says Robot Wars on the marquee.



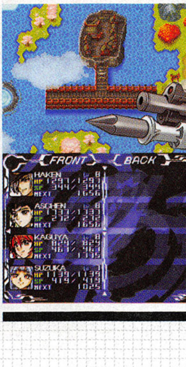
With a steady hand on the attack button, the combo counter can climb toward the triple digits.

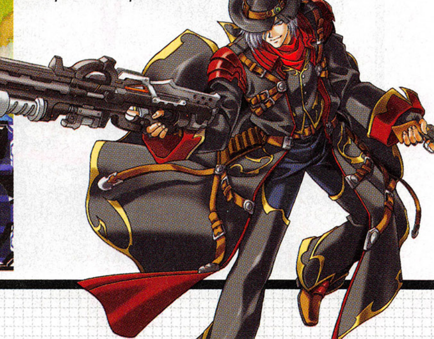


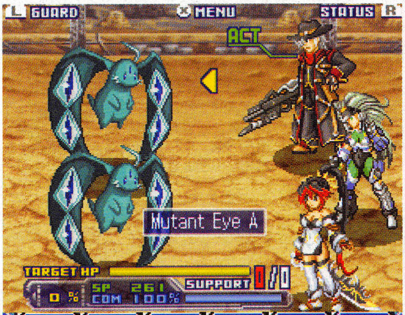


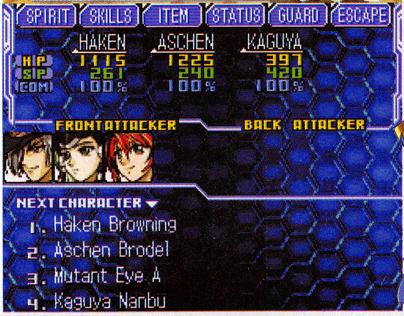
Aschen:
Shall I pull her dress down, Sir?
That would likely elicit a response.

How does he hold that thing steady? Don't worry about it.





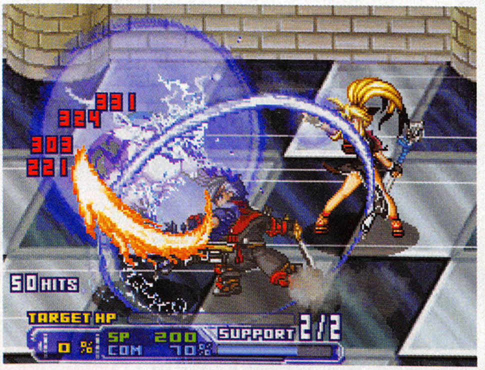

L GUARD
MENU
STATUS R
ACT
Mutant Eye A
TARGET HP
SUPPORT 0/0
0 %
SP 261
COM 100%


SPIRIT
SKILLS
ITEM
STATUS
GUARD
ESCAPE
FRONT ATTACKER
BACK ATTACKER

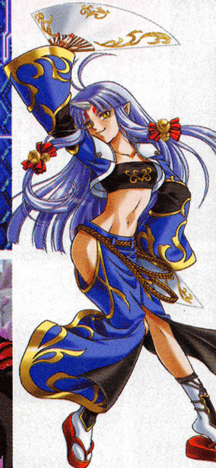
	HAKEN	ASCHEN	KAGUYA
HP	1115	1225	397
SP	261	240	420
COM	100%	100%	100%

NEXT CHARACTER

1. Haken Browning
2. Aschen Brodel
3. Mutant Eye A
4. Kaguya Nanbu

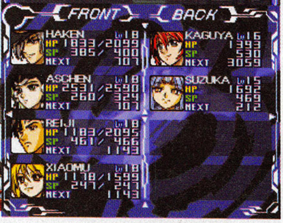

331
324
303
221
50 HITS
TARGET HP
SUPPORT 2/2
0 %
SP 200
COM 70%

If you build the Frontier Gauge up to 100 percent, the combos that follow are way beyond belief.



Kaguya

Whoa! It's opening!
...There's someone inside!?

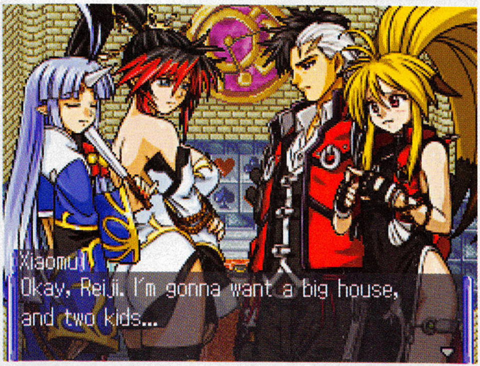


	Lv	HP	SP	NEXT
HAKEN	18	1833/2099	385/400	707
ASCHEN	18	2531/2590	260/324	707
REIJI	18	1183/2095	461/466	1143
XIAOMU	18	1178/1599	247/247	1143
KAGUYA	16	1393	530	3059
SUZUKA	15	1692	469	212

Koma

Would you like to buy something first?
Maybe you'd like to, you know...
"rest up" before we go?

Neko ni Koban
10
GUARD
1
GUARD
MISS!
10
10
GUARD
1
10
GUARD
MISS!
MISS!



Xiaomu

Okay, Reiji. I'm gonna want a big house,
and two kids...

The characters of Super Robot Taisen wear some pretty crazy outfits. Hey, if you were an alien princess, would you let anyone tell you how to dress?

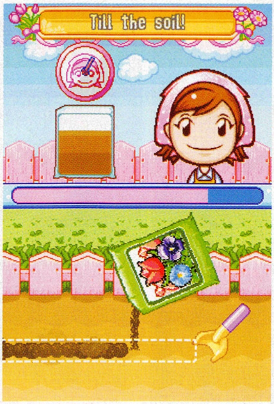
PREVIEW
MARCH '09

How Does Your Garden Grow?

>GARDENING MAMA

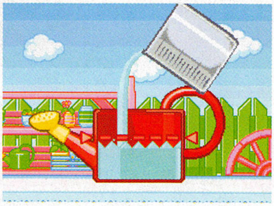
PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **MAJESCO**
DEVELOPER: **COOKING MAMA LTD** • RELEASE: **MARCH 2009**

Tired of being stuck behind a hot stove all day, Mama is stepping out of the kitchen and into the yard in Gardening Mama for DS. Growing plants might not have the universal appeal of preparing great meals, but in some ways Gardening Mama is an improvement over its culinary counterpart, largely because its overhead map provides structure and shows how you're progressing. The simple, fast-paced, touch-driven minigame-based action is similar to that of Cooking Mama; you tend to your flowers and other crops in multiple phases—tilling the earth, mixing a fertilizer solution, scattering seeds, transferring flowers to better soil, and more. Since maintaining a garden is a long-term process, each plant requires several steps before it is fully grown, and you have to allow time to pass (by focusing on other crops) between steps. As you successfully raise your plants, you'll unlock new species of fruits, vegetables, and flowers, and earn new gardening gear and garden decorations. —**CHRIS H.**

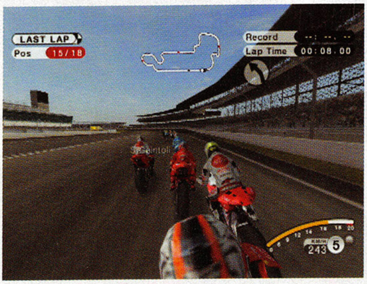


Plant the bulb!

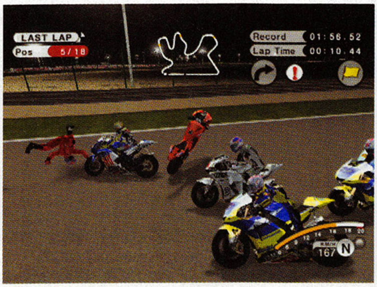
Make a rainbow!



Choose a bulb!



[Below] MotoGP brings all the excitement of high-speed motorcycle racing without the real-life asphalt burn. That's gotta hurt!

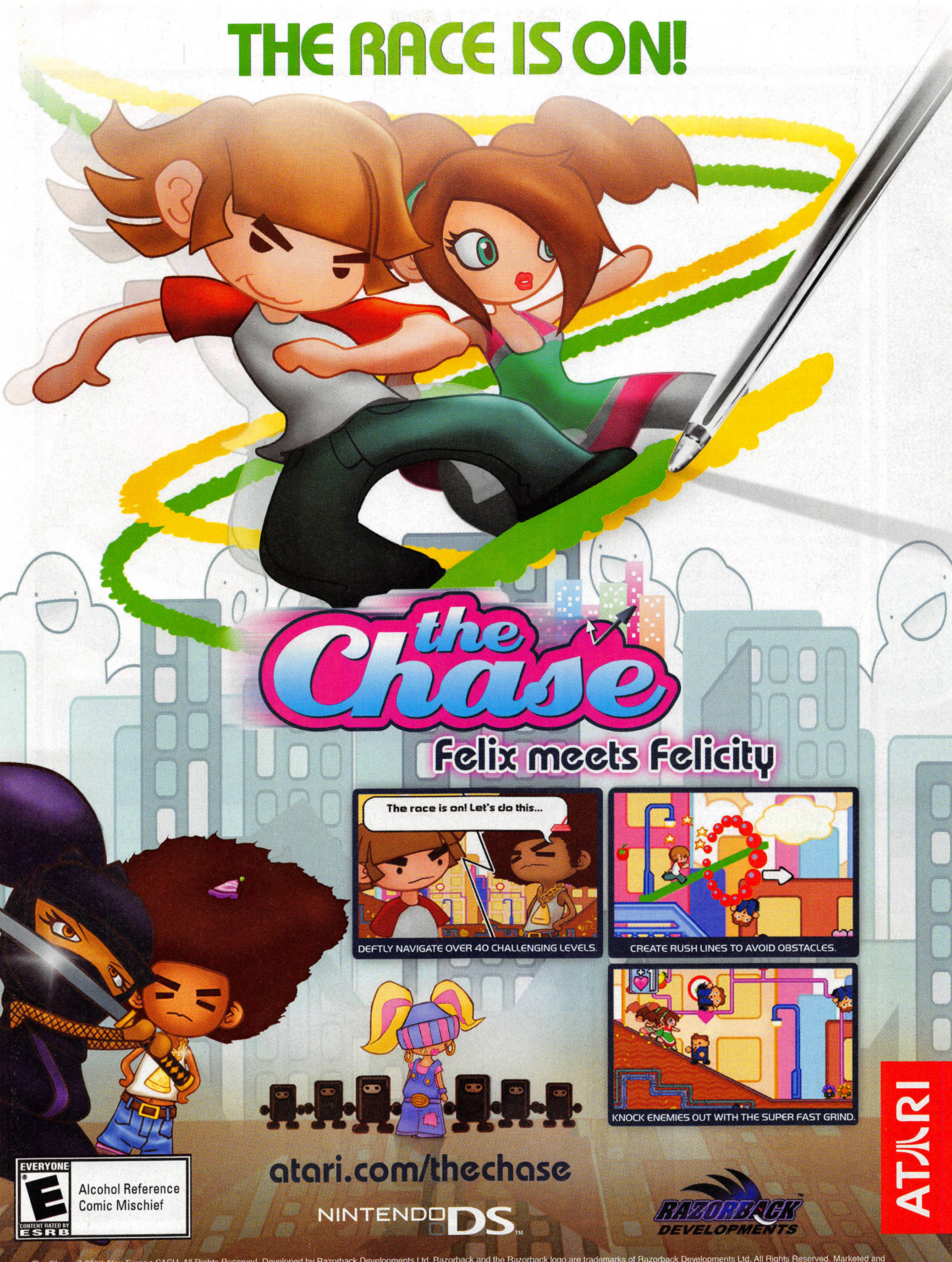


Hang on Tight

>MOTOGP

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **MILESTONE** • RELEASE: **MARCH 2009**

They say you never forget how to ride a bike. Riding full-throttle on a racing motorcycle, on the other hand, is something few can master. This is especially true in video games, where apart from the likes of Sega's classic coin-op Hang-On and EA's Road Rash series, motorcycle riding has been solely for patient, skilled sim fans. For everyone else, it's been an exercise in frustration. Capcom is hoping to change this with MotoGP by combining arcade-style handling with horizontal, handlebarlike Wii Remote tilt control. The result: very smooth, near one-to-one control. Of course, the game will also offer Advanced and Simulation racing models in an attempt to cater to players of all skill levels. To that end, the game features real-world bikes, teams, and tracks, with 20-racer heats in 125cc, 250cc, and the maniacal 800cc MotoGP classes. In addition to the usual array of practice, single-racer, and championship modes, MotoGP shakes things up with 50 different challenges, ranging from one-on-one duels to races where you must stay above a certain speed or you'll lose—kind of like in that Keanu Reeves movie, only without the bomb or Dennis Hopper. —**RANDY N.**


THE RACE IS ON!
the Chase
Felix meets Felicity
The race is on! Let's do this...
DEFTLY NAVIGATE OVER 40 CHALLENGING LEVELS.
CREATE RUSH LINES TO AVOID OBSTACLES.
KNOCK ENEMIES OUT WITH THE SUPER FAST GRIND.
atari.com/thechase
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Alcohol Reference
Comic Mischief
NINTENDO DS™
RAZORBACK DEVELOPMENTS
ATARI

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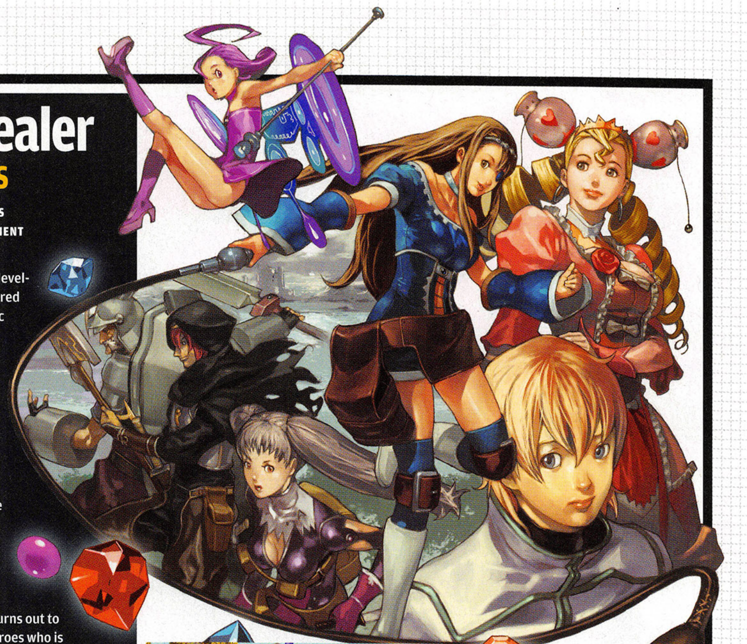
Scene Stealer

>STEAL PRINCESS

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **CLIMAX ENTERTAINMENT**
RELEASE: **MARCH 2009**



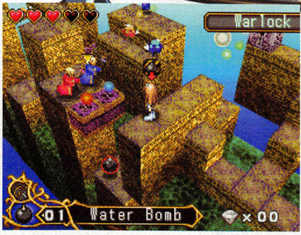
Sixteen years ago, Japanese developer Climax Entertainment scored a cult Genesis hit with isometric action-RPG Landstalker. But despite attempting a spiritual successor every few years (Lady Stalker, Dark Savior, Time Stalkers), Climax has never managed to match the original title's success. Undeterred, they're trying again with Steal Princess, a game that looks a whole lot like Landstalker but plays out very differently.

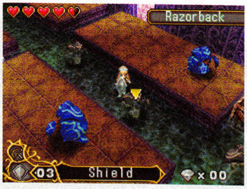
The heroine of this adventure is Anise, a notorious thief wanted throughout the realm. Much to her chagrin, she also turns out to be one of those predestined heroes who is apparently the only person in the entire universe that is capable of defeating some giant demon and saving the world. You know the drill. When word of her destiny reaches King Sigmund, he sends the reluctant thief off to do her duty, just as soon as she pays back the sum total of everything she's swiped from the kingdom's nobility.

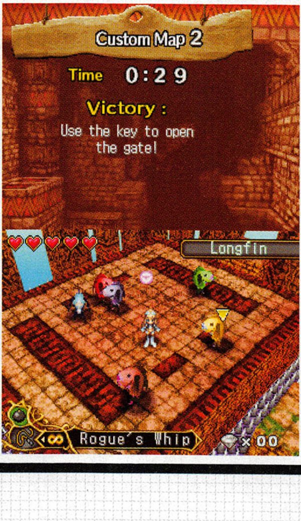
Instead of using the RPG structure of its predecessors, Steal Princess adapts more of a puzzle-game style. You have to jump, whip, and slice your way through short isometric stages, earning bronze, silver, and gold medals based on your time. The better your medals, the better your ending, so there's plenty of incentive to replay stages and improve your time. In addition to unlocking new levels, you get to keep any gems you find. Those can be used to pay down your debt, and, when you've got that monkey off your back, you can start spending your earnings on new pieces for the game's level editor.

You guide Anise with either the touch screen or the Control Pad, using her whip to snare enemies, flip switches, and pull her to higher platforms. She can pick up and hold one other item, and she'll need to use a wide variety of blades to cut through the monsters on each map, since most foes are weak to only a single type of weapon. Each map requires an exacting sequence of actions, and a single mistake will often force you to start over. Fortunately, a speed run shouldn't last more than a minute or two, so it won't be long before you're back on track.

Steal Princess offers only a tiny slice of the Landstalker experience, but with 140 built-in maps and the ability to make, share, and download plenty more, it looks poised to scratch your isometric adventuring itch for months to come. —**CASEY L.**





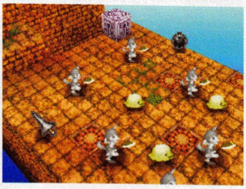


Custom Map 2

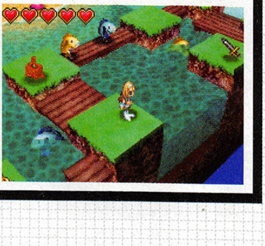
Time 0:29

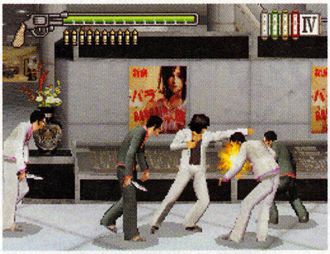
Victory :

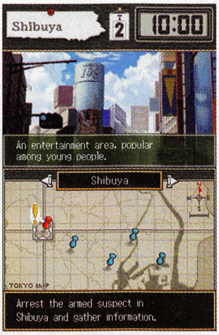
Use the key to open the gate!



[Below] Tired of fighting the Red Baron, Snoopy appears to teach Anise a lesson.





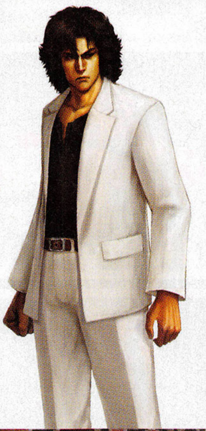

Shibuya
2
10:00
An entertainment area, popular among young people.
Shibuya
TOKYO MAP
Arrest the armed suspect in Shibuya and gather information.

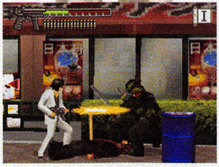
A Fistful of Justice

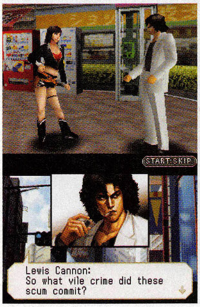
> TOKYO BEAT DOWN

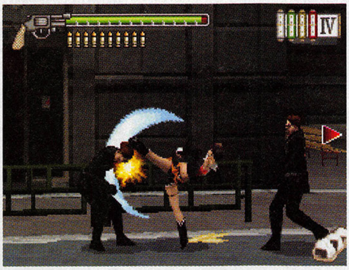
PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **SUCCESS** • RELEASE: **MARCH 2009**

Featuring a cheesy '80s-police-show vibe mixed with a distinctly Japanese flavor, Tokyo Beat Down is an old-school-style beat-'em-up that puts you in control of cops who punch first and ask questions later. Whether you're using young Lewis Cannon (loose cannon...get it?), grizzled vet Takeshi Bando, or female officer Rika Hyodo, you'll be taking to the streets of famous Tokyo neighborhoods such as Shibuya and Akihabara to beat the stuffing out of criminals with punches, kicks, spin attacks, running tackles, and throws; Bando's back-breaking powerbomb is especially cool. Since you're playing as the cops, you'll have access to firearms, as well; by holding the L Button and pressing X or Y, you can draw your pistol (or one of several other weapons you can find) to stop dangerous foes. Naturally, you'll be able to find life-replenishing foodstuffs lying on the ground to keep you in the action as you take out an assortment of villains that include generic thugs, soldiers in riot gear, and requisite angry fat guys. Even though the game has a classic feel, it has plenty of modern elements as well, including 3-D visuals and plentiful cut-scenes. —**CHRIS H.**

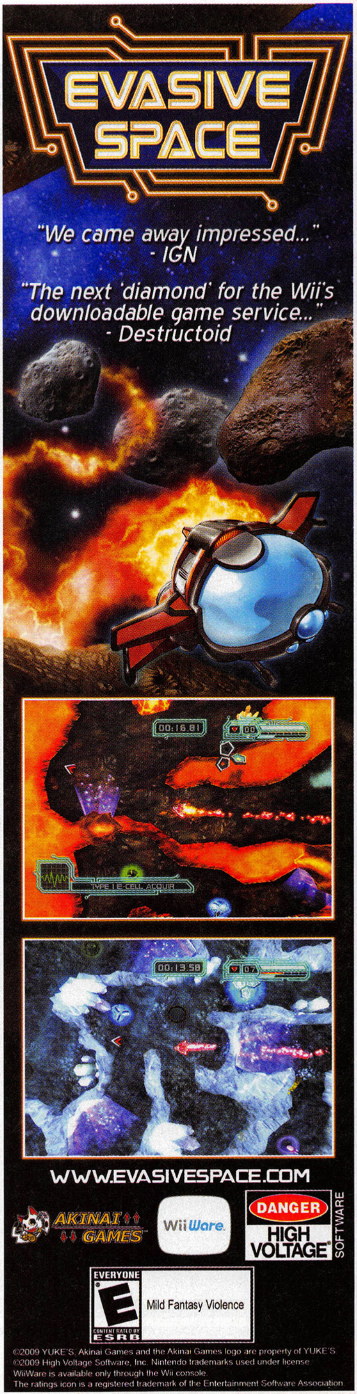





START:SKIP
Lewis Cannon:
So what vile crime did these scum commit?



Don't underestimate Rika just because she's a woman. If the bad guys give her a reason, she'll kick their teeth out.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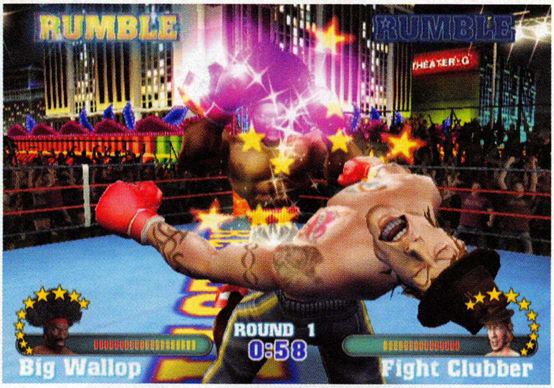
Almost Famous

> READY 2 RUMBLE REVOLUTION

PLATFORM: **Wii** · PUBLISHER: **ATARI**
DEVELOPER: **AKI** · RELEASE: **MARCH 2009**

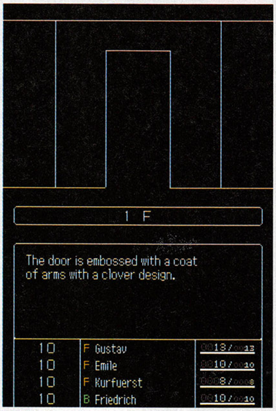
The Ready 2 Rumble series has always been about arcadey boxing with over-the-top characters, and this new Wii game follows that tradition. You take one of the parodied celebrities—such as Mosh Deck'em (David Beckham), Syphon Cruel (Simon Cowell), or Red Dermato (Shaun "Flying Tomato" White)—or your own custom character into the ring and beat your opponent senseless using Wii's motion-control features. The Wii Remote and Nunchuk correspond to your left and right hands, respectively, and you punch by gesturing accordingly. Don't think you can swing away mindlessly, however: you have a limited amount of stamina, so you'll have to block (by holding Z and B) or dodge (by pushing or pulling both the Remote and Nunchuk simultaneously) if you want to stay competitive. Fortunately, you can alter your created character's stats in the single-player Championship mode by playing training minigames; for example, you can jump rope by matching your gestures to the cascading icons to improve your stamina. —**JUSTIN C.**



RUMBLE
RUMBLE
ROUND 1
0:52
Stoney Rigatoni
Fever Friction

[Above] Big Wallop uses his full Rumble meter to pummel Fight Clubber (who is clearly nothing like Brad Pitt).

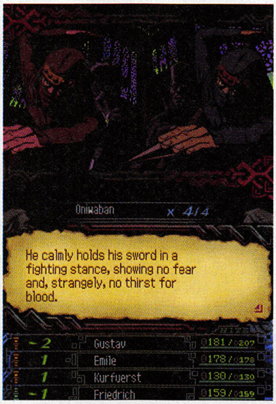
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
ROUND 1
0:26
The Impersonator
El Concertina



1 F

The door is embossed with a coat of arms with a clover design.

10 F Gustav 13 / 13
10 F Emile 10 / 10
10 F Kurfuerst 8 / 8
10 B Friedrich 10 / 10



Oniwaban x 4/4

He calmly holds his sword in a fighting stance, showing no fear and, strangely, no thirst for blood.

-2 Gustav 181 / 207
1 Emile 178 / 178
1 Kurfuerst 130 / 130
-1 Friedrich 159 / 159

In-Spired RPG

> THE DARK SPIRE

PLATFORM: **DS** · PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **SUCCESS** · RELEASE: **MARCH 2009**

Atlus continues to lead the way in DS RPGs, adding spring release The Dark Spire to its rolls. The first-person dungeon-crawler offers your choice of the Classic black-and-white wireframe dungeon display that recalls computer games from the '70s and early '80s or the Modern hand-drawn look. The gameplay, though, is all classic. You toss the virtual dice to determine character attributes, set party formations, and spend experience points at the Guild to develop class levels, skills, stats, and spells. As you explore Archmage Tyrhung's tower of mist and shadow with your group of warriors, thieves, mages, and priests, you encounter 80 types of enemies, such as ghosts, goblins, bats, and killer rabbits. The going gets tough; even treasure chests can bite back with booby traps. If a party member is poisoned, you can cure him, but antidotes and healing potions are hard to come by. Every step of the way is a trial, but a dynamic map of each floor does show how far you've come. A dash of new graphics and a dollop of old-school cool add up to a game that will slay RPG fans. —**GEORGE S.**

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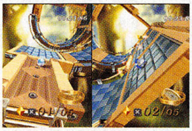
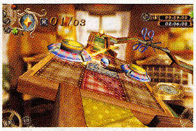
Get the Ball Rolling

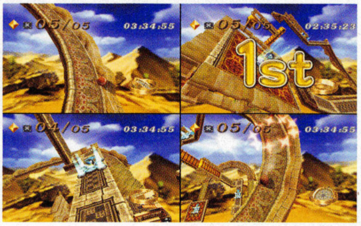
>MARBLE SAGA: KORORINPA

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
DEVELOPER: **HUDSON** • RELEASE: **MARCH 2009**

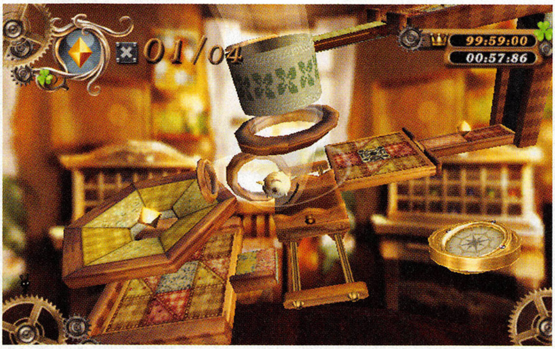
The first Kororinpa was a fun but underrated game that let players tilt the Wii Remote to guide marbles through treacherous stages, collecting gems and avoiding traps as they tried to make it to the end of each mazelike level. The sequel—Marble Saga: Kororinpa—offers more of the same, but is better in nearly every way. For one thing, the controls have been significantly improved; it's much easier to accurately and responsively guide your marble, and the stages have been made more complex in kind. There are a lot more courses to navigate, too—120 in the game's story mode, and another 30 that can be controlled exclusively with the Balance Board. You can also save and share custom-made stages, and customizers can have even more fun by putting Miis into their marbles. An all-new story—about an ant named Anthony attempting to find a golden sunflower—ties everything together; as you grab special collectibles in each stage, you'll get ever closer to attaining that goal. —**CHRIS H.**

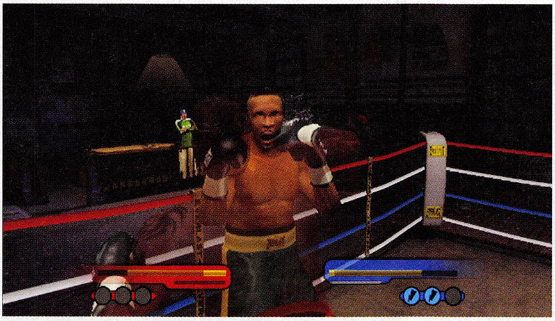






With multiplayer options and new stages provided over WiiConnect24, Marble Saga should have plenty of replay value.





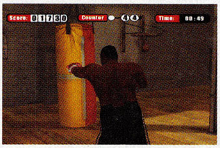
Only in America

>DON KING BOXING

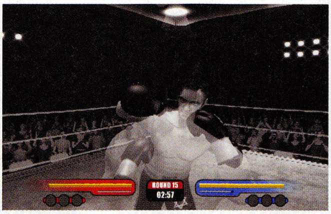
PLATFORM: **Wii (ALSO ON DS)** • PUBLISHER: **2K SPORTS**
DEVELOPER: **2K CHINA** • RELEASE: **MARCH 2009**

After taking a beating from critics with Don King Presents: Prizefighter for Xbox 360, the world's premier purveyor of pugilistic pandemonium seeks redemption with a new version of the game on Wii (now entitled simply Don King Boxing). Naturally, the change of venue gives the sweet science an elevated tangibility as players swing the Wii Remote and Nunchuk to throw punches. Your exact movements determine whether you'll deliver a jab, hook, or uppercut, and holding the Z or B Button lets you go to the body. The controls seem pretty responsive for the most part, but landing punches lacked a certain oomph in our early play test.

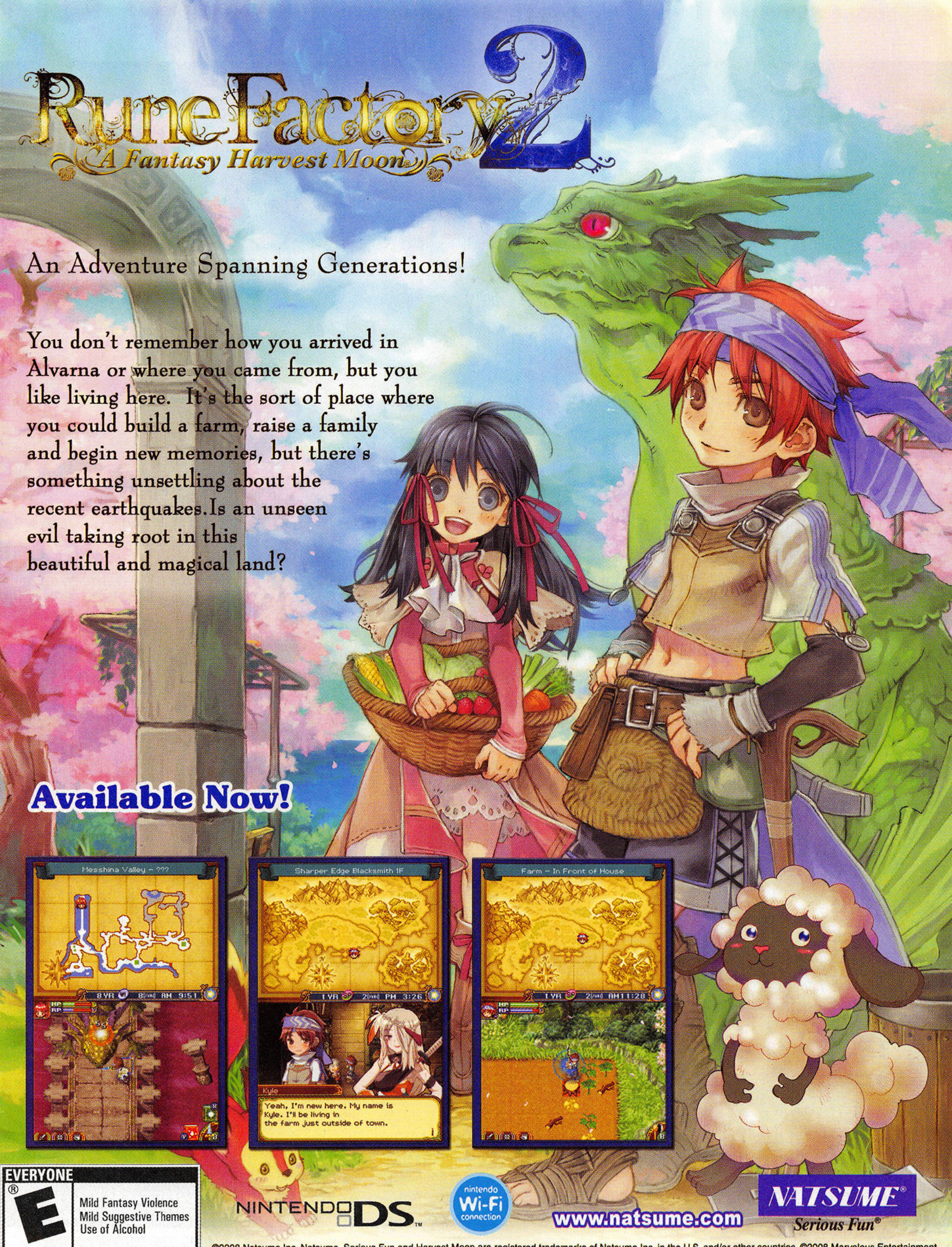
The Wii version reprises the documentary-style career mode from Prizefighter, recounting your boxer's rise to greatness with video interviews starring, among others, Mario Van Peebles (and King himself, of course). New features include Wii Balance Board support and a training mode that keeps track of how many calories you burn in real life. —**STEVE T.**



[Below] Classic moments from boxing history are interspersed throughout career mode. Completing them will unlock legendary fighters such as "Cinderella Man" James Braddock.



Rune Factory 2
A Fantasy Harvest Moon


Messhina Valley - ???
8 YR
8 AM 9:51
HP
RP
Sharper Edge Blacksmith 1F
1 YR
2 PM 3:26
Farm - In Front of House
1 YR
2 AM11:28
HP
RP

Kyle

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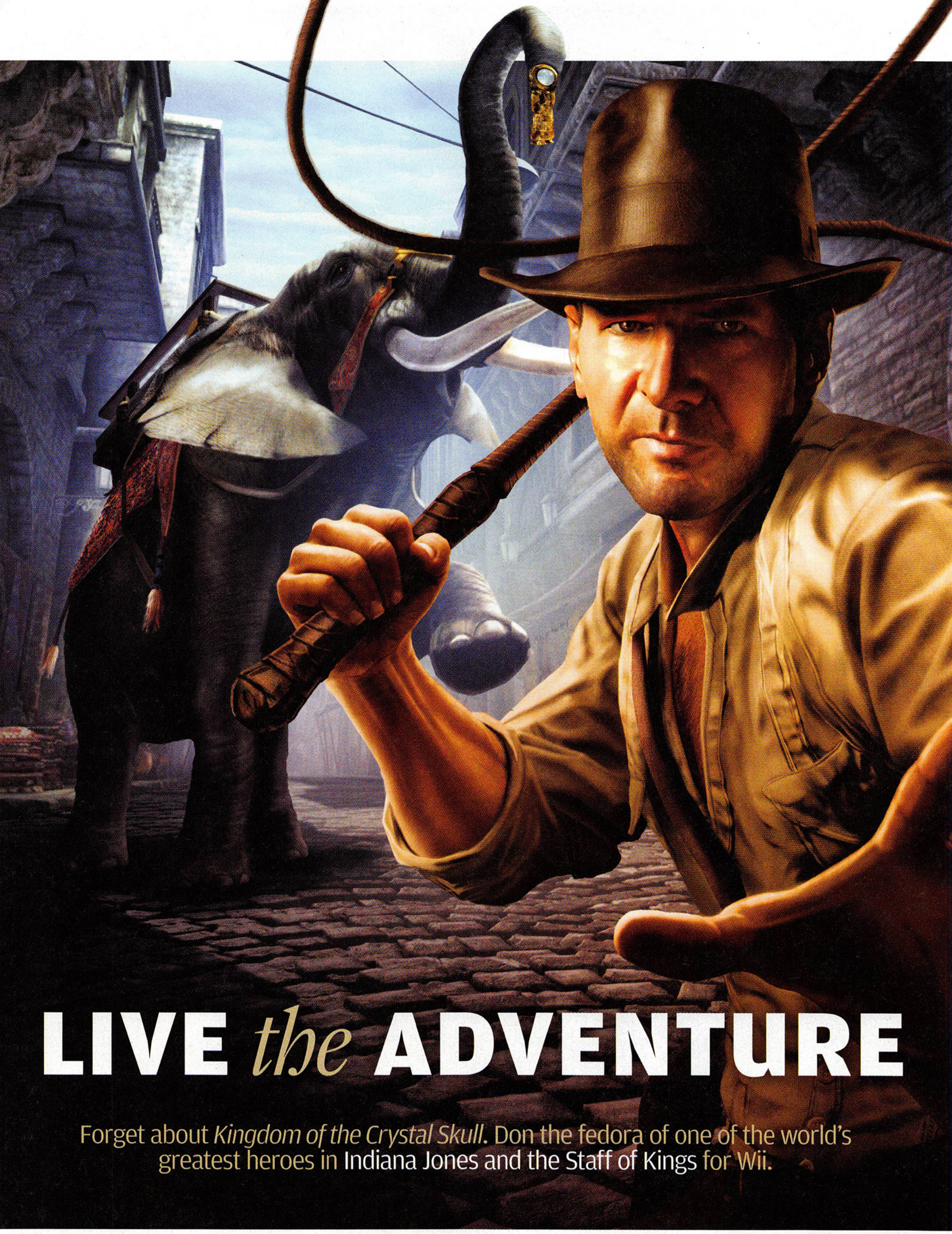
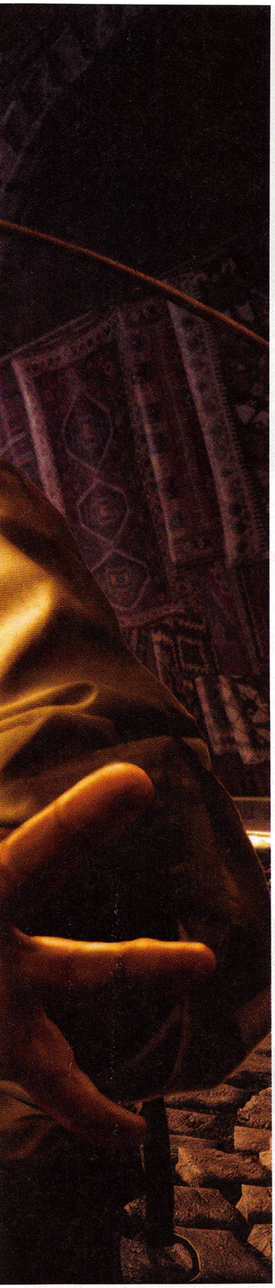
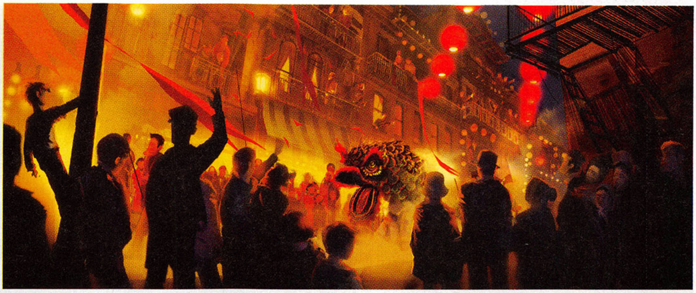


LIVE *the* ADVENTURE

Forget about *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Don the fedora of one of the world's greatest heroes in Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings for Wii.

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN





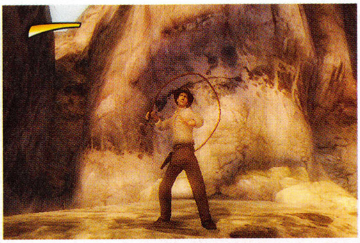
The latest Indiana Jones video game features no aliens, no crystal skulls, no giant man-eating ants, no monkeys with pompadours, no illegitimate children, and no flying nuke-proof refrigerators. What Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings does feature, however, is whip-snapping action, a globe-hopping quest, battles against sinister Nazis, a wide variety of content, and a return to all of the things that have made Indiana Jones the world's most famous archaeologist.

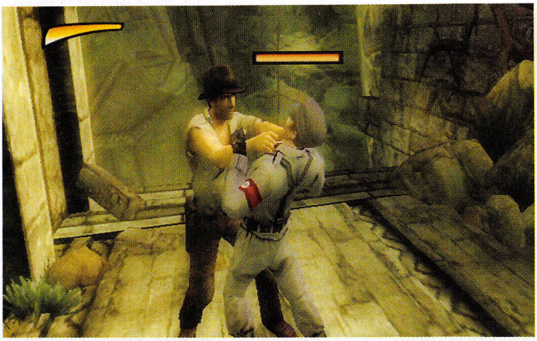
"Indiana Jones is perhaps one of the best video game licenses out there and we wanted to bring back the excitement of classic Indiana Jones games to Wii," proclaims lead designer Stephane Brochu of developer A2M (Artificial Mind & Movement). "We honestly believe that we've done an excellent job of putting the player into Indy's shoes."

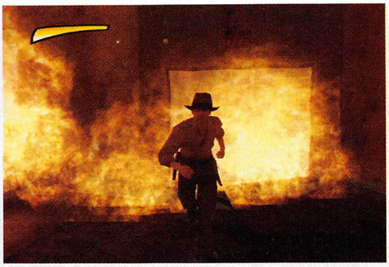
Although Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings features a completely original story—revolving around Indy's search for his missing mentor Dr. Charles Kingston and an object of biblical proportions (presumably the Staff of Kings)—the game is, unsurprisingly, heavily influenced by the films. If you've seen Indy do it in the classic movie trilogy, chances are you'll get to do it in this third-person action-adventure game.

"Indiana Jones has always been about the golden age of pulp adventures: lots of fights, mysterious locales, car chases, dames, bigger-than-life villains, etc. These are the elements that we focused on, starting with story," Brochu explains. "Once we had a solid story, it was then easy to slot in game moments that would make sense storywise, but also would be fun. We really wanted to bring a complete Indiana Jones experience to the player, very much like what he would get from watching one of the movies. So, with that in mind, we had little choice but to bring [in] all of these elements since an Indy movie where there was only exploration or only combat would not be a very good movie."

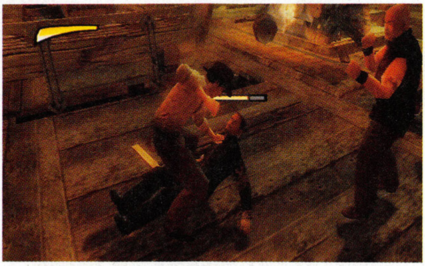
[Right] Indy strikes a classic pose and prepares to set off on an epic quest that takes him around the world.

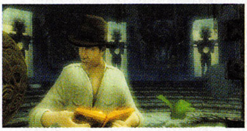






Indiana Jones is a man of many interests and talents. Sometimes he's up for some reading; other times he likes to punch guys in the face. And he's always eager to escape a blazing inferno.





CRACK THAT WHIP

One of the first things that comes to mind when you think about Indiana Jones is his trademark whip—a natural fit for Wii's motion controls. "There are millions of Indiana Jones fans out there," comments Matt Vella, producer at publisher LucasArts, "and we want to make a game that's accessible to those who love his adventures, and Wii helps reach that audience. Indy is an extremely physical character, so the unique motion-sensing control of the Wii is the best way to put you in Indy's shoes and immerse you in that world."

By holding the B Button and swinging the Wii Remote, you make Indy lash out with his whip. As you explore the game's impressively lit, highly detailed environments, you can use the whip to smash through obstacles, swing over pits, or grab objects—an idol positioned over a flaming chasm, for example. Some more-resilient obstacles require an extra touch; you can grab onto debris with a flick of the whip, then pull back to remove the debris and clear your path.

Naturally, you can use the whip during combat as well. By holding B and swinging the Remote in various directions, you can grab enemies by the neck, torso, or feet, then pull them in to dish out some punishment. You can also use the whip to disarm enemies—and that's merely one aspect of combat.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

"Paying tribute is always a tricky proposition since if you're not careful, you end up simply copying what you admire about the original," says lead designer Stephane Brochu. "The trick is to find a slight twist that, while people recognize where it comes from, still surprises them at the end." We know A2M is putting its own spin on the classic boulder-chase scene from the beginning of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* into Staff of Kings, but what else will make its way into the game? Here are a few of our favorite Indy moments that we wouldn't mind revisiting one way or another.

WHY'D IT HAVE TO BE SNAKES?

(Raiders of the Lost Ark)

We haven't seen many snakes yet in Staff of Kings, but they have to be in there somewhere, right? What's an Indy adventure without some slitherin'?

MINE-CART CHASE

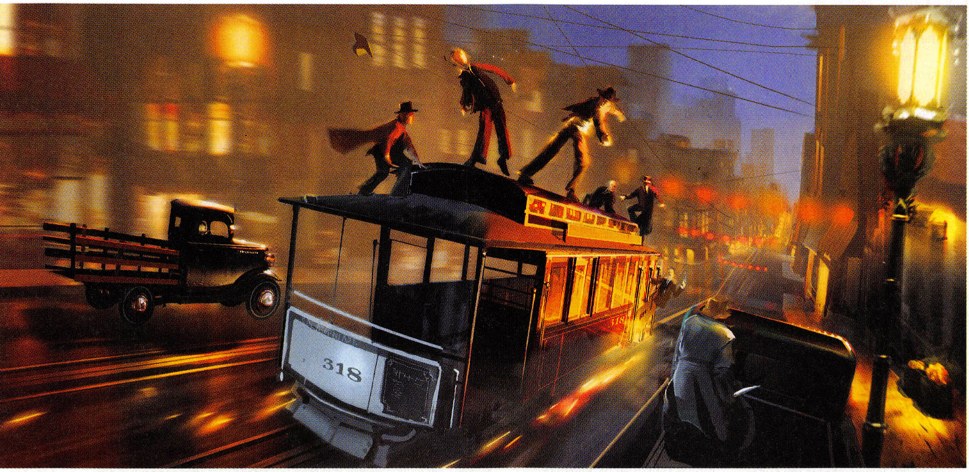
(Indiana Jones and the Temple of the Doom)

A mine-cart chase would be loads of fun, especially with Wii Remote controls. Possibly more fun than a chilled-monkey-brain-eating minigame.

HE CHOSE...POORLY

(Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade)

We imagine it'd be pretty tough to find a good excuse for the Grail knight to make a return appearance, but his line, "He chose...poorly," was a classic. Maybe he could just randomly show up and mock your decision-making skills whenever you make a boneheaded move.



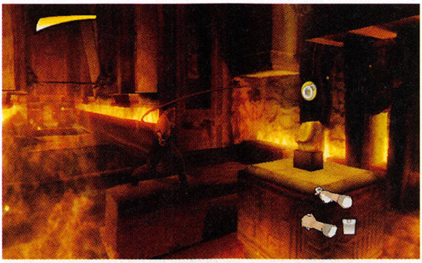
"Instead of using gestures to simply replace button presses, we went with a control scheme that made Indy mimic what the player is doing," Brochu describes. "For example, we have three different punches in the game, and this is for both hands: right and left jabs, hooks, and uppercuts. To perform the various punches, the player simply swings with the Wii Remote or the Nunchuk, and Indy will perform the same punch." Additionally, you can press A and B simultaneously to dodge and counterattack, and press the Z Button to grapple.

PRESS THE ADVANTAGE

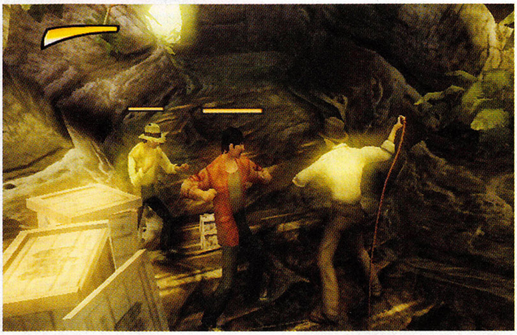
While Dr. Jones is well versed in fisticuffs, he gets through fights with his wits as much as his muscle—which is essential, since the odds are always against him. Indy's not above using anything and everything in the vicinity to take out his enemies. In one fight we used trash-can lids, bottles, mops, and 2x4s against some Asian street toughs; in another conflict—set in Lao Che's bar, no less—we tossed pool balls at our foes and rammed enemies' heads into a gong, a giant vase, and hundred-gallon aquariums, then chucked at our adversaries' faces the octopi that spilled onto the floor.

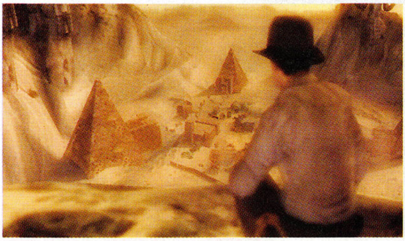
"Interactivity was very important to us," affirmed Brochu. "Watching the movies, we noticed that whenever Indy was fighting, he'd try and use his immediate environment to his advantage. He's not the strongest man in most fights, but he's certainly the smartest and we wanted the player to feel that."

To further turn fights in his favor, Indy can use his whip to yank parts of the environments—such as scaffolding or bookshelves—down on the bad guys, and by pressing the A Button (the game's context-sensitive "interact" button) in one battle, we were able to grab onto overhead cables and swing feet-first into enemies. You can also gain an advantage in combat by utilizing optional routes through the stages. For example, when we entered a room through the front door, Indy got knocked on the head as soon as he entered, and he was instantly surrounded, but by exploring we were able to locate a back route and surprise



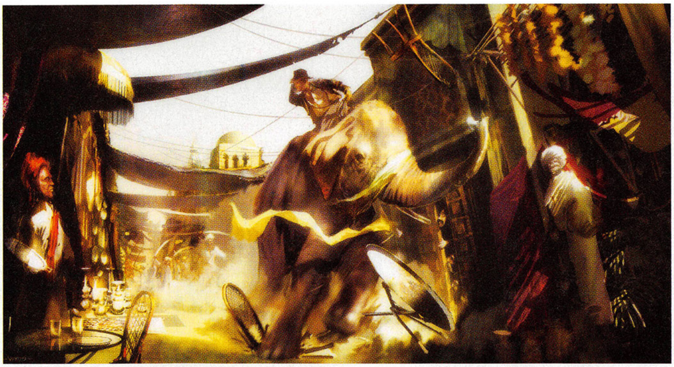
[Below] The dig site is full of Nazis. If you haven't heard, Indy hates those guys.





the enemies from behind.

"The idea is to show that Indy isn't afraid of a fight, but first he'd rather use his brains," notes Vella. "He is a professor, after all."



THE WORLD AWAITS

There's a lot more to the game than beating up street thugs and Nazi soldiers, though. Indy's quest to find the Staff of Kings takes him around the globe, from California to Central America to Istanbul to the frozen cliffs of Nepal and beyond. Each region not only provides beautiful new vistas and a natural extension of the story, but also new types of challenges and more gameplay variety.

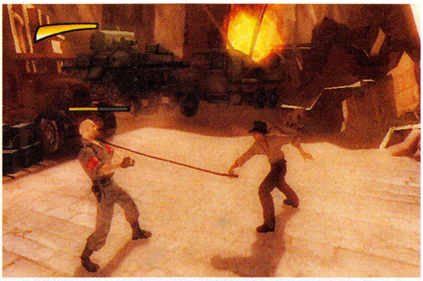
Like most of the Indiana Jones films, Staff of Kings begins with a prologue that, for the most part, stands separate from the rest of the plot. Taking place in the Sudan in 1939 (that's one year after the events of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, in case you're keeping track), the area introduces you to the fundamentals of gameplay, including an assortment of low-commitment gesture-based controls that further immerse you in the experience. You'll repeatedly slide the Remote past the Nunchuk to simulate setting a torch on fire, swing the Remote above and below you to ward off encroaching arachnids, and rapidly shake the Remote and Nunchuk to pull yourself up while hanging from a cliff. The prologue also introduces you to the game's villain—Magnus Völler, another former student of Dr. Kingston who attended the university with Indy but is now working in the service of der Führer.

After crossing paths with Völler and escaping from a Nazi-infested dig site—with the classic Indiana Jones theme playing in the background, of course—Indy makes his getaway by biplane, leading to the game's first vehicle sequence. To fly the plane, you hold the Wii Remote upright like a joystick and tilt it in any direction to steer, avoiding dangerous cliffs while zeroing in on enemy fighters and shooting them down with the B Button. Other games have tried similar control schemes with mixed results, but it works remarkably well in Staff of Kings. Later in the game, you'll get to control boats and motorcycles, too.

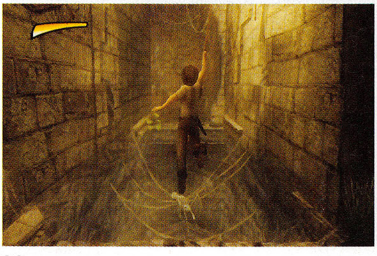
YOU CALL THIS ARCHAEOLOGY?

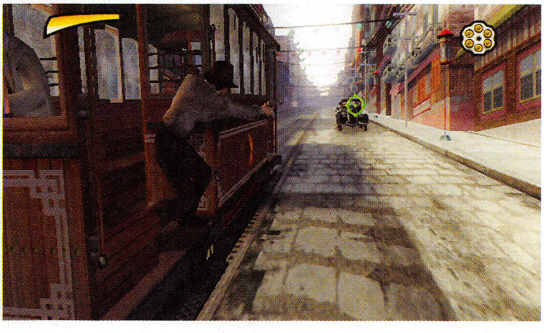
Indy's adventure continues in the Chinatown area of San Francisco after he's summoned by an old friend (named Archie Tan) who says he's got a tip on Dr. Kingston's whereabouts. The bad guys are after Archie's info, too, which causes Indy to be pulled into a kidnapping plot, explore a buried ship called *The Star of the Orient*, race down the hills of San Francisco on a cable car with the villains in hot pursuit, and engage in multiple gunplay sequences.

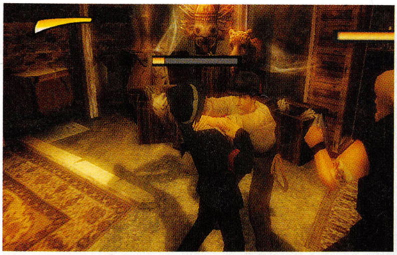
Surviving firefights is all about using cover; by pressing the A Button near most objects, you'll make Indy duck out of the enemy's line of fire. If you then press up (or to the side, in some cases) on the Control Stick, you'll pop out from your safe spot, allowing you to take aim at the screen with the Remote and press B to lay down some fire with Indy's trusty sidearm. Gun-toting bad guys can be formidable, but luckily there



[Right] Ah, San Francisco. Indy and his friend Archie make their getaway by cable car, but the bad guys are right behind them. If they catch up to you it's all over, so take 'em out fast.







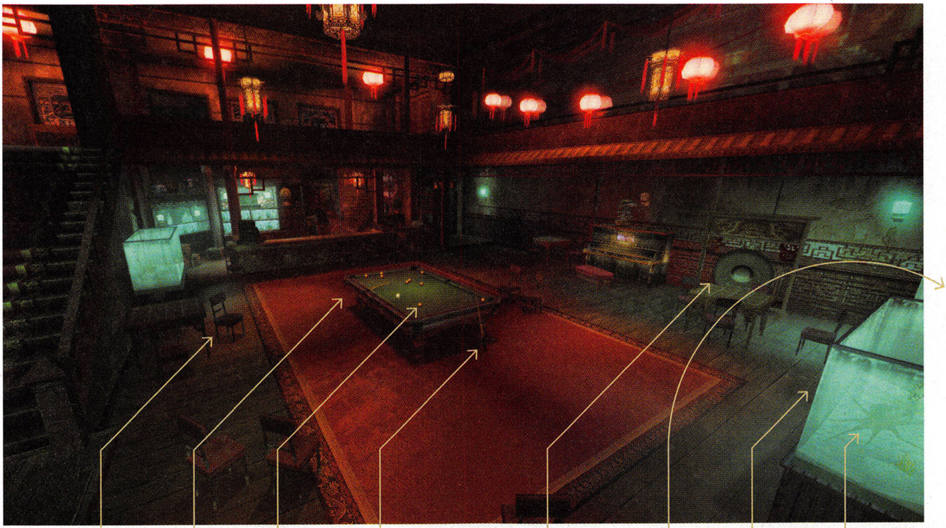
[Left] Step 1: Grab bad guy by the collarbone. Step 2: Ram him into anything nearby.

are interactive elements to aid you; your cursor changes color to indicate that there's a background element worth shooting. And although your pistol holds only six shots, you won't have to worry about running out of ammo; as in classic arcade light-gun shooters, you simply point offscreen and shake the Remote to reload.

Indy's quest next takes him to a lush Panamanian temple, where you'll find our hero doing what he does best: avoiding traps and solving puzzles in long-forgotten ruins. There's plenty of conflict in the area, to be sure, but the ruins let Indy put his adventuring skills to the test. In one part of a temple, for example, Indy must walk the four paths of ancient priests to open a stone door that leads deeper into the structure. Each path contains a different type of challenge; one is as simple as bringing along a torch to ward off attacking insects, whereas another forces you to run a gauntlet of collapsing stone blocks, and yet another involves sidling along a narrow ledge while spears intermittently shoot out of the walls and a moving stone

EVERYTHING BUT THE KITCHEN SINK

The environments in Staff of Kings are highly interactive and provide plenty of opportunities to gain the upper hand in combat. Take a look at some of the ways you can use the surroundings to your advantage in Lao Che's bar.



CHAIRS
If you're gonna clobber someone over the head, you might as well do it with a chair. It's a staple of Indy's repertoire.

POOL TABLE
Bash your enemy into the table until he's seeing stars.

POOL BALLS
Pool balls don't make very good hand-to-hand weapons, but they're great for tossing at your enemies.

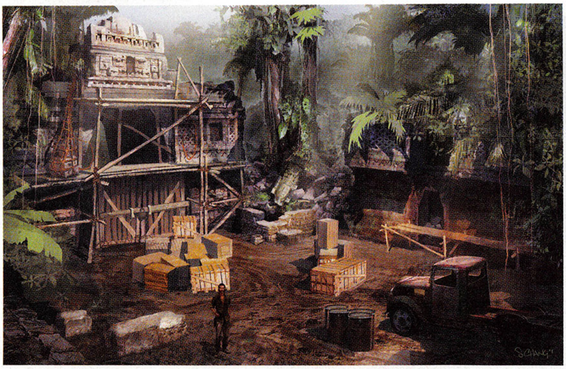
POOL CUES
It's a big, long stick. Yep, it's pretty useful for smacking enemies around.

GONG
After grappling with an enemy, you can drag him to various objects for a little environmental fun. Ramming an enemy into the gong makes a satisfying sound.

POTTERY
Just off the screen is a large antique vase. Smash a bad guy into it to knock him out and decrease Lao Che's net worth.

AQUARIUMS
When you drive a foe into an aquarium, it breaks and spills its contents onto the floor.

OCTOPI
After you break an aquarium you'll have access to the octopi inside. Grab 'em and throw 'em on your enemies' faces, then watch the hilarity ensue!



[Above] Hasn't Indy learned his lesson about rickety bridges yet?

slab threatens to shove you into a bottomless pit.

A later puzzle requires you to navigate an arena full of spinning platforms and giant rolling stone spheres (powered by Havok physics to add an element of unpredictability) while pushing blocks that unleash even more spheres and eventually release a small orb that's the key to getting to the next area. If you fall prey to one of the many traps, it isn't game over; Indy just loses his hat, picks himself up, dusts himself off, and tries again from the nearest checkpoint. (He *is* more or less immortal after drinking from the Holy Grail, after all.)

At some point during his journey, Indy encounters a requisite part of any *Jones* adventure—an all-new leading lady. "There will be a certain woman who will keep Indy on his toes. In Staff of Kings, an Irish photojournalist named Maggie O'Malley, who is working to document the local culture and history, encounters our hero and is swept up in the action," reveals Vella. Don't expect much in the way of returning characters, however, either female or male; fan-favorites like Sallah and Short Round are sitting this one out.

JONESING FOR MORE

Staff of Kings' single-player mode—comprising six exotic locales and numerous gameplay styles—seems to have more than enough material to satisfy any Indiana Jones fan, but the game doesn't stop there. It also includes a separate two-player co-op mode that boasts an all-new storyline and action that's built around the cooperative experience.

"LucasArts and A2M wanted to make multiplayer something that was easily accessible to people of all ages and gaming backgrounds," states Vella. "The goal also is to make it so players can pick up and play it in short bursts or play for hours should they choose. Players will be able to do a variety of things that all flow together in a co-op story, which is something we feel is unique. Amongst other things, you will explore new environments, cooperatively solve puzzles and avoid traps, navigate river rapids, take part in air combat, and much more."

LucasArts isn't ready to reveal who the second playable character is in co-op mode, but they've confirmed that it's someone Indy has known for a very long time; fans of the franchise can look forward to some senior moments.

Still not enough? Then grab a few friends for four-player tank battles or aerial dogfights. To top it off, the single-player mode allows you to acquire a treasure trove's worth of unlockables by collecting hidden fedora icons and completing various achievements.

"We have everything from movie trailers to concept art to alternate skins and costumes for Indy. We are also working on a very, very special unlockable that will make a lot of old-school gamers very happy, as well as show some new fans how fun classic games can really be," Vella discloses.

Wii owners aren't the only ones who will get to enjoy Staff of Kings. Though details are scarce, a DS version is in the works as well. It seems like the only thing fans aren't getting is a personally signed apology from George Lucas and Steven Spielberg for the goofiness of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*.

But regardless of how you felt about Dr. Jones's latest theatrical release, all evidence points to Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings being a return to form for the legendary hero, as well as a spectacular adventure in its own right.

"If you take away the name Indiana Jones from this game, it is still a great game," asserts Vella. "We feel we've delivered a memorable adventure that utilizes the best of what Wii has to offer, and we're sure that both fans and newcomers to Indiana Jones will have a great time playing this game."

We'll find out if the game lives up to that promise when it arrives late this spring.

[Below] We don't know exactly what's going on here, but if Indy's lost his sleeve, it must be serious business.

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NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

OUR JOURNEY through Nintendo video game history as documented by Nintendo Power begins midway through the life cycle of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), Nintendo's first video game console. Since the decision to publish Nintendo Power arose from the success of that console and its first two years of games, we'll start with a look at the NES's early days.

Super Mario Bros.—Shigeru Miyamoto's action-platform masterpiece released in October 1985—was the standard-bearer for the NES. After the boom and bust of the early '80s, when Atari and other video game companies essentially closed up shop, the NES proved to a skeptical world that video games could provide hours of entertainment, challenge, joy, and value. Mr. Miyamoto has often said that his ideal video game is like a garden, where you can explore and discover hidden wonders. Super Mario Bros. was that garden, and the NES was the gateway that led to it—and to many wonderful gardens, some of them bright and whimsical, others dark and thrilling. The mid '80s were a time of experimentation, in which many video game genres were pioneered. Legendary franchises such as Mega Man, Castlevania, Metroid, and The Legend of Zelda all got their start in this era. Experimentation with control interfaces existed from the outset in the form of the Zapper and R.O.B. the robot. The NES didn't employ cutting-edge technology, but its processors were capable of generating sound and graphics that were a leap beyond those of the previous generation of home consoles. And in the hands of innovative programmers, the NES turned out to be a versatile and powerful instrument.

The NES proved to be so popular that some game publishers rushed products to market, creating a glut of games that many pundits thought would result in the video game market collapsing anew. But in spite of the existence of mediocre titles, there was always something new and exciting. Titles such as Rygar, Mighty Bomb Jack, The Adventures of Lolo, Ice Climber, Wizards & Warriors, Ghosts 'n Goblins, Crystalis, and many others may not have generated long-lasting franchises, but they provided hours of fun, and in the end that's what games are all about.

SUPER MARIO BROS. 2, RELEASED OCTOBER 1988, NINTENDO

The game that we knew as Super Mario Bros. 2 in North America was called Doki Doki Panic in Japan, where it had been released a year earlier without any connection to Mario. The game entitled Super Mario Bros. 2 that was released in Japan (in 1986) arrived on this side of the Pacific in 1993 entitled Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels, which was part of the Super Mario All-Stars collection for Super NES.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA, RELEASED AUGUST 1987, NINTENDO

By 1988, a year after The Legend of Zelda was released in North America, the title was well on its way to becoming a legend in more than name. An additional quest, accessible on the same cartridge to players who defeated Ganon in the main game, provided a second round of adventure with new dungeon locations and maps. Players raised on the comparatively shallow gaming experiences from the Atari generation of video games were thrilled to discover such hidden depths. *Replay value* entered the gaming lexicon.

The World of Dreams took on a Mario-esque air with the inclusion of Mario, Luigi, the Mushroom Retainer (Toad), and Princess Toadstool (Princess Peach). The game introduced Shy Guys, Birdo, and Mouser to the Super Mario Bros. pantheon.

NINTENDO POWER
Super Mario 2
Zelda – Second Quest
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ZELDA
The Second Quest Begins
04
05

NINTENDO 64

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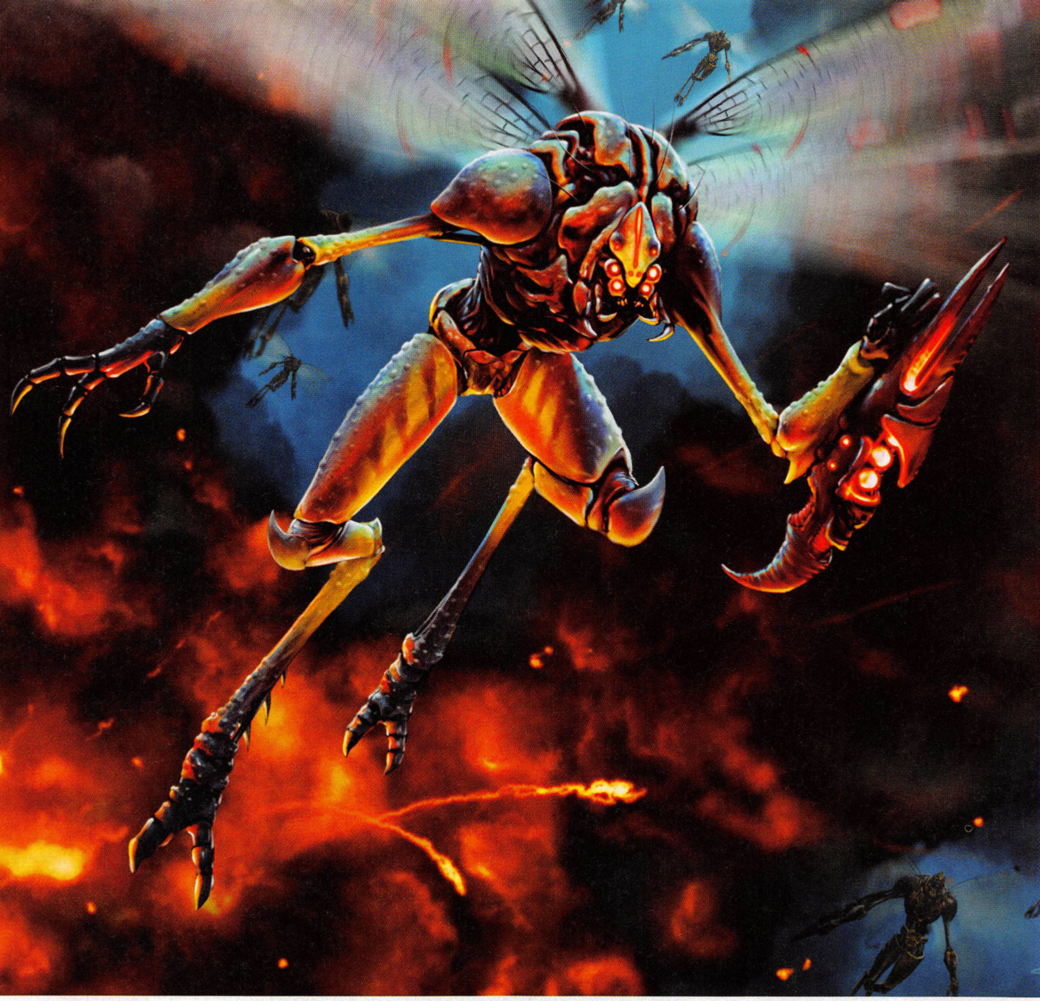
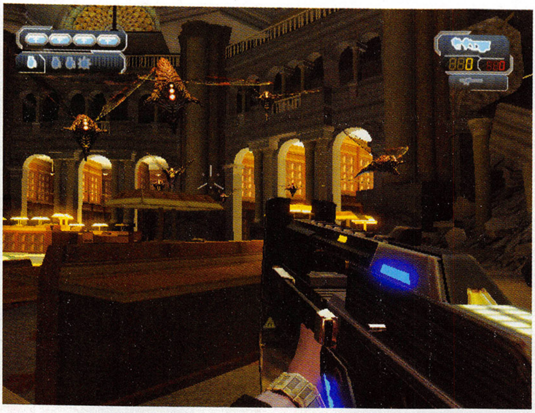


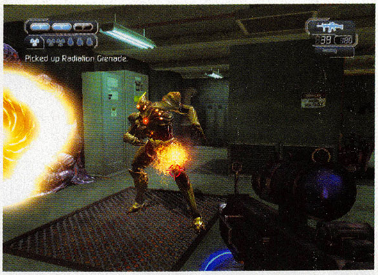
LIBERTY OR DEATH

Mr. Ford goes to Washington to fight some aliens in Sega and High Voltage Software's impressive first-person shooter, The Conduit.

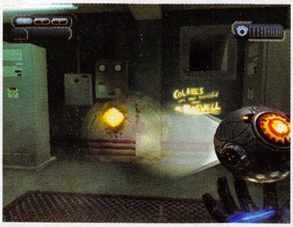
The first time you see The Conduit, you know it's something special. Purely from a visual standpoint, the game stands head and shoulders above other similar titles, thanks to the technical mastery of developer High Voltage Software, who created the title sans publisher. The Conduit is saturated with normal mapping and depth-of-field blur and all that other graphically impressive stuff that gets gamers in a tizzy—stuff that other developers have yet to fully realize on Wii. Because the game is so extraordinary, it came as no surprise when a publisher picked up the title—which Sega did late last year. But is The Conduit actually any fun? We found out for ourselves when we went to Sega's offices to check out two new levels and the never-before-played multiplayer mode.

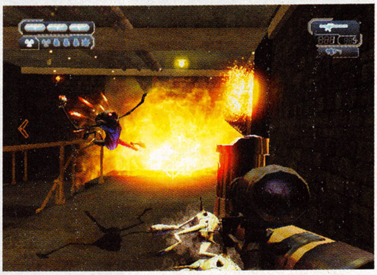
BY JUSTIN CHENG



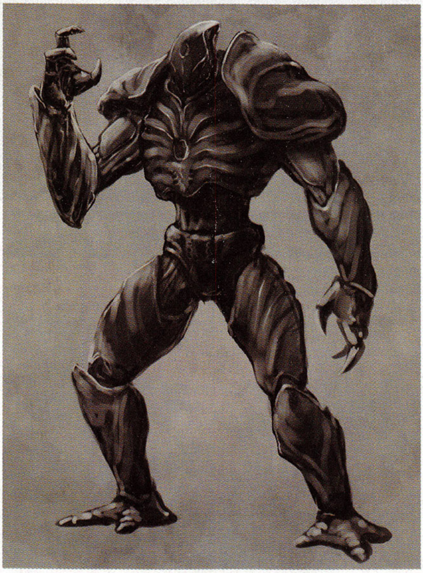


[Left] The Library of Congress gets invaded by flying Drudge. Good thing you've got some Trust weapons on you.



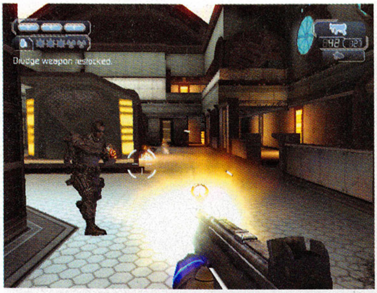


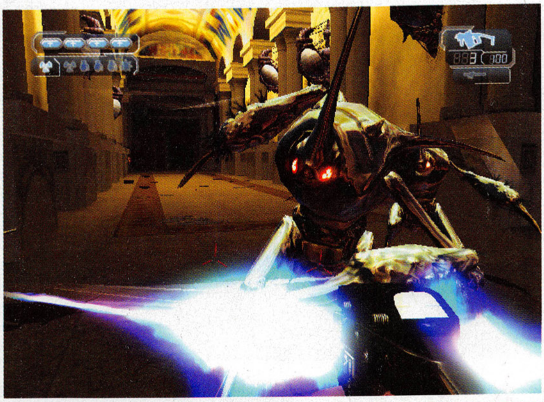
[Above] The All-Seeing Eye definitely comes in handy when trying to locate hidden switches and the like. You don't get it until after you make your way through the Reagan National Airport, though.



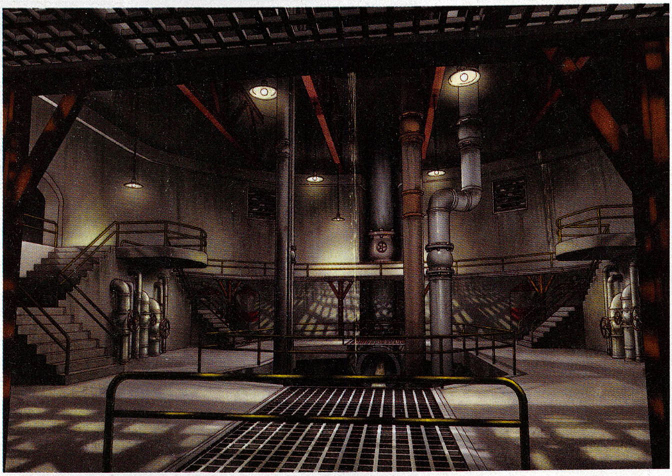
But we're getting ahead of ourselves a bit. First, some basics about The Conduit: Portals—or more accurately, conduits—have started cropping up all over Washington D.C., and aliens known as the Drudge have been waltzing through these gateways, with malicious intentions for the human race. Thankfully, a shadowy government organization known as the Trust—think Sector 7 from the 2007 *Transformers* film, only with 100% less John Turturro—stands ready to defend the world from the invading extraterrestrials, using technology the general public can only dream about. (And with a name like the Trust, you know they're trustworthy...right?) A Trust higher-up named John Adams enlists you, an ex-Secret Service agent named Mr. Ford, to stop the Drudge. You're armed with an arsenal of first-person-shooter standbys (pistols, submachine guns, shotguns, and rocket launchers), plus more-advanced weaponry developed by the Trust (a gun that lobs orbs of electricity, for example). Of course, you can also make use of any Drudge firearms you come across on your adventures. (One Drudge weapon we saw fired laser beams like a machine gun, though you could hold the trigger to charge the beam so that it deals more damage.) However, you can carry only two weapons at a time—not counting hand grenades—so you must choose your firearms carefully...or simply swap a weapon if you come across a better one.

Before you can go off and fight the good fight, however, you have to make sure the controls are to your liking. The basic setup is not radically different from that of other first-person shooters on Wii—run around with the Control Stick and look around by pointing at the screen with the remote—but the amount of customization in The Conduit is simply staggering. You can alter your horizontal and vertical look sensitivity without pausing, so you can feel the effects of your adjustments in real time. You can also change the size of your dead zone (how much you're able to move the reticle around on the screen before you start turning) and how sensitive the motion controls are. There aren't a whole lot of motion controls, but they work well given the context. You can thrust the remote forward to perform a powerful melee attack, and you can flick the Nunchuk forward to toss a grenade. The default button layout is logical as well: shoot with B, jump with A, crouch with C, lock onto an enemy

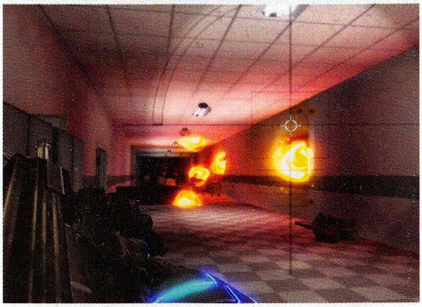




[Above] You can only use the Wii Speak peripheral if you're playing with people you've shared Friend Codes with.



[Below] The multiplayer Medical Facility map looks like your average hospital...until people start shooting and blowing stuff up.



with Z, press - to reload and pick up weapons, use + to use the All-Seeing Eye (ASE; more on that later), press down on the Control Pad to zoom, press left to change grenade type, and press right to change weapons. It's an ideal control scheme for a Wii FPS like this, but we appreciate that High Voltage gives you the option to totally change the buttons around if you so choose.

FORD TOUGH

While the basic premise of the game is that you're fending off an alien invasion, we didn't actually fight the Drudge in the first of the two levels that were demoed. Rather, Mr. Adams sets your sights on a terrorist known as Prometheus. Little is known about Prometheus other than he's ostensibly a bad guy, and at the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport he's up to something nefarious. As you enter the airport, human soldiers immediately start shooting in your direction; it turns out Prometheus has the power to control people. In this kill-or-be-killed situation, you have little choice but to defend yourself by eradicating all threats in the area, even if they technically should be your allies. Enemies pop up from behind counters and rappel from the ceiling, guns blazing. You have to get behind cover yourself to stay alive while avoiding incoming fire and numerous grenades. (Luckily, these guys aren't as grenade-happy as the soldiers in Call of Duty: World at War.)

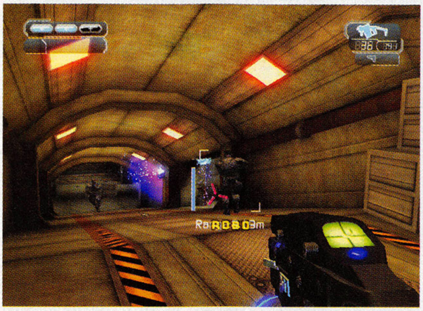
As you fight your way through the airport, you eventually come across an area filled with seemingly unconscious or dead baddies. That makes things a little too easy, though, and some brown-orange gas is released into the air, reviving these fallen soldiers. (The secret behind this gas wasn't revealed to us. As with everything else regarding the story, Sega's still playing it close to the vest.)

While few secrets are revealed, there are some puzzles to solve. It's fairly simple in this area—in fact, the only puzzle is finding and pressing two separate glowing buttons to open up a path—but it does become a bit more complex (though not overly so; this is a shooter, first and foremost) as the game progresses, especially after this airport level. See, your ultimate goal in this stage, other than to find Prometheus, is to get to the subway in the airport, which is where you'll find the aforementioned ASE. You'll use the handy little tool to solve later puzzles, revealing hidden switches and areas. You don't actually get to use it in the airport since the level ends as soon as you get your hands on the device, but the ASE becomes vitally important in subsequent levels.

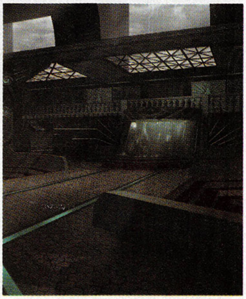
ALL-SEEING IS BELIEVING

Take the Library of Congress, for example. (As we've learned from the Nic Cage flick *National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets*, there's more to the Library of Congress than meets the eye.) Using the ASE, you find a number of switches to unlock a door. Finding the switches isn't as hard as it might seem, though, even if you can't see them with the naked eye: the ASE beeps as you get closer to a hidden object, and the device projects the image of the Masonic Eye of Providence (which is also known as the all-seeing eye—appropriate, no?) atop a pyramid (see the back of a US one-dollar bill) like a flashlight, allowing you to spot the camouflaged switches.

To get to this door in the first place, you'll have to shoot your way through some more baddies—and the initial baddies are Trust agents (the Drudge make an appearance a little later on, further stacking the deck against you). The agents are under the mistaken impression that you're a puppet for Prometheus, and they have orders to take you out by any means possible. The logical thing to do would be to tell him to call off the troops, and that's exactly



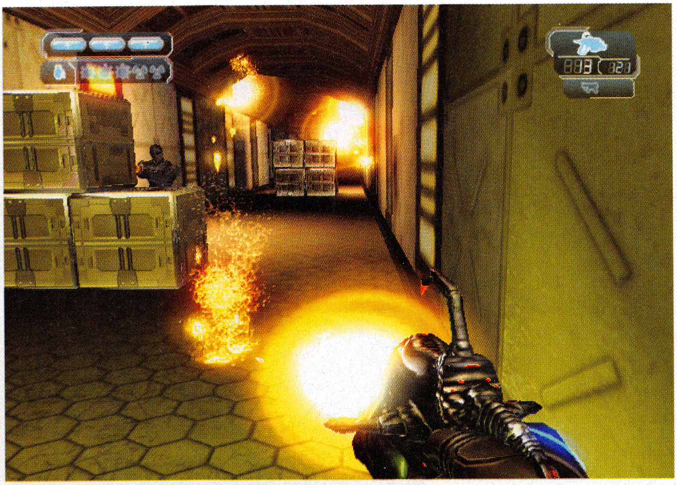
[Above] You can press Z to lock onto your opponent and see his health bar. Just don't get so focused on one person that someone else locks onto you.



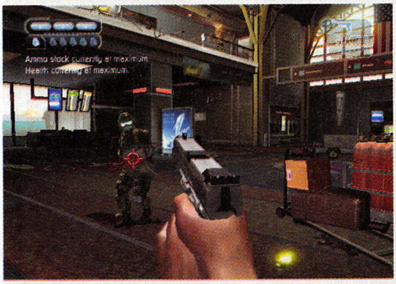
ACTING OUT

Despite its heavy emphasis on shoot-'em-up action, The Conduit is more than just a shooter—there's a plot full of twists and turns that ties the set pieces together. Much of this plot is revealed in interspersed dialogue scenes between Trust agent John Adams and protagonist Mr. Ford (we can't help but feel that there's a presidential allusion there, but it could be because of the Washington D.C. setting). The revelations come fast and furious when Prometheus enters the picture.

Because so much of the narrative relies heavily on the dialogue and its delivery, it's a good thing The Conduit has quality voice work. Mark A. Sheppard, who's perhaps best known for playing lawyer Romo Lampkin on *Battlestar Galactica* (or for you Joss Whedon fans out there, Badger on *Firefly*), voices Mr. Ford. Mark's real-life father, William Morgan Sheppard, voices John Adams (who, we assume, is not Mr. Ford's father in the game, but you never know...). The elder Sheppard is most famous in video gaming circles for voicing Colonel Hargrove in EA's Medal of Honor games. Finally, Prometheus is voiced by none other than Hercules himself (from the *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* TV show), Kevin Sorbo.

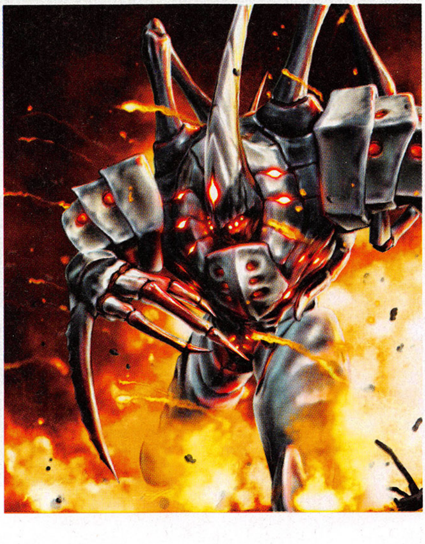


[Right] There are lots of crates and other objects to hide behind in the Training Complex map.


Ammo stock currently at maximum.
Health currently at maximum.

[Left] It's not that unusual to see soldiers at the airport, but it is unusual that they start shooting at you the minute you step into the building...unless they're being controlled by Prometheus, that is.

what you do; however, Mr. Adams tells you to go on with the mission, eliminating anyone who gets in your way (Mr. Adams isn't really a people person). The benefit of fighting Trust agents is that you can commandeer their high-tech weaponry. One such weapon has two reticles, and although that does mean you could theoretically shoot two enemies at once—assuming they're standing side-by-side—it's mainly used to shoot around corners. The gun fires two arrowlike bolts that are tethered together with a cable. One bolt anchors into the wall while the momentum swings the other bolt around the corner, hitting the enemy who's taking cover. This gun also has a secondary firing mode that's essentially a machine gun; it may not be quite as clever a weapon as the bolts, but it's certainly effective.



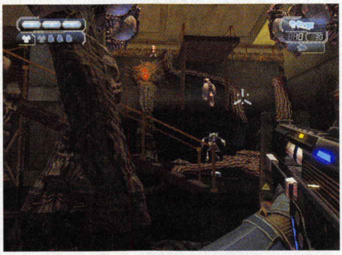
SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

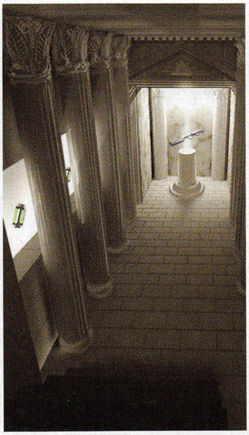
Learning the ins and outs of the multitude of weapons is definitely important throughout your adventure, but especially so in the multiplayer game. The Conduit is as full-featured in this area as any FPS we've seen, with up to 16 players (random players from across the globe or in your region, or people you've shared Friend Codes with) able to frag each other in Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, or Capture the Flag via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. When we played it, only six players could play Deathmatch at once, but we experienced nary a graphical or gameplay hiccup, even with explosions going off all over the place.

The first of the two maps we played on was the Medical Facility—like all of the multiplayer maps, it's an area from the single-player game but totally remade to better suit multiplayer gameplay with what the developers call the Human Weapons set (handguns, submachine guns, shotguns, and the like). It was a basic free-for-all in the confined hallways of the hospital-like facility, and while most players preferred the submachine gun, there was liberal use of grenades as well. It's most effective to lock onto your opponent with Z, allowing you to see how much health he has left, then aiming for the head. A headshot won't necessarily frag your opponent with one hit, but it will do substantial damage. Of course, sometimes it's best to sneak up on someone and launch a melee attack while they're unaware. Just don't get tunnel vision: you always have to watch your back, even when you've got an opponent locked in your sights, because you never know who might sneak up behind you. (During the demo Sega mentioned the potential implementation of a 180-degree turn button so you can quickly take out someone at your rear, which would be a welcome addition.)

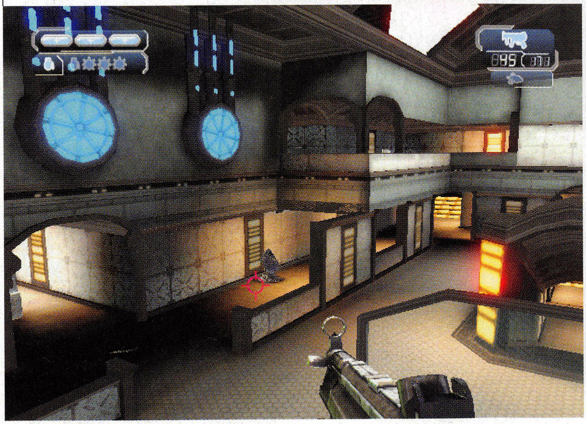
This became an even more pressing issue in the second Deathmatch map, the Training Complex. It wasn't so much because of the map itself—though an open central area with balconies on the perimeter leaves you free to be sniped—but mainly because of the Explosive Weapons set. Everyone starts the match with a rocket launcher and goes at it. Sure, there are some other weapons to be found around the map (a gun that lobs electric orbs, for example), but there's little reason to swap if you have decent aim; even if you don't hit your opponent dead-on, the splash damage will definitely bring the pain. Of course, the trade-off for such deadly firepower is that it takes some time to ready a fresh rocket, leaving you pretty much defenseless as you reload. When the frustration is too much, it can pay to gather the other weapons scattered about the map (if you get a break from being bombarded by incoming missiles).

Fragging others is good fun (*getting* fragged not so much, but at least you can hop right back into the match), but chatting with friends and enemies would be the icing on the cake. Because there's no headset for Wii, The Conduit will utilize the Wii Speak peripheral so you can talk trash and/or tactics. Although the feature wasn't up and running for our play session, High Voltage promises it'll be present by the time the game hits stores in spring.



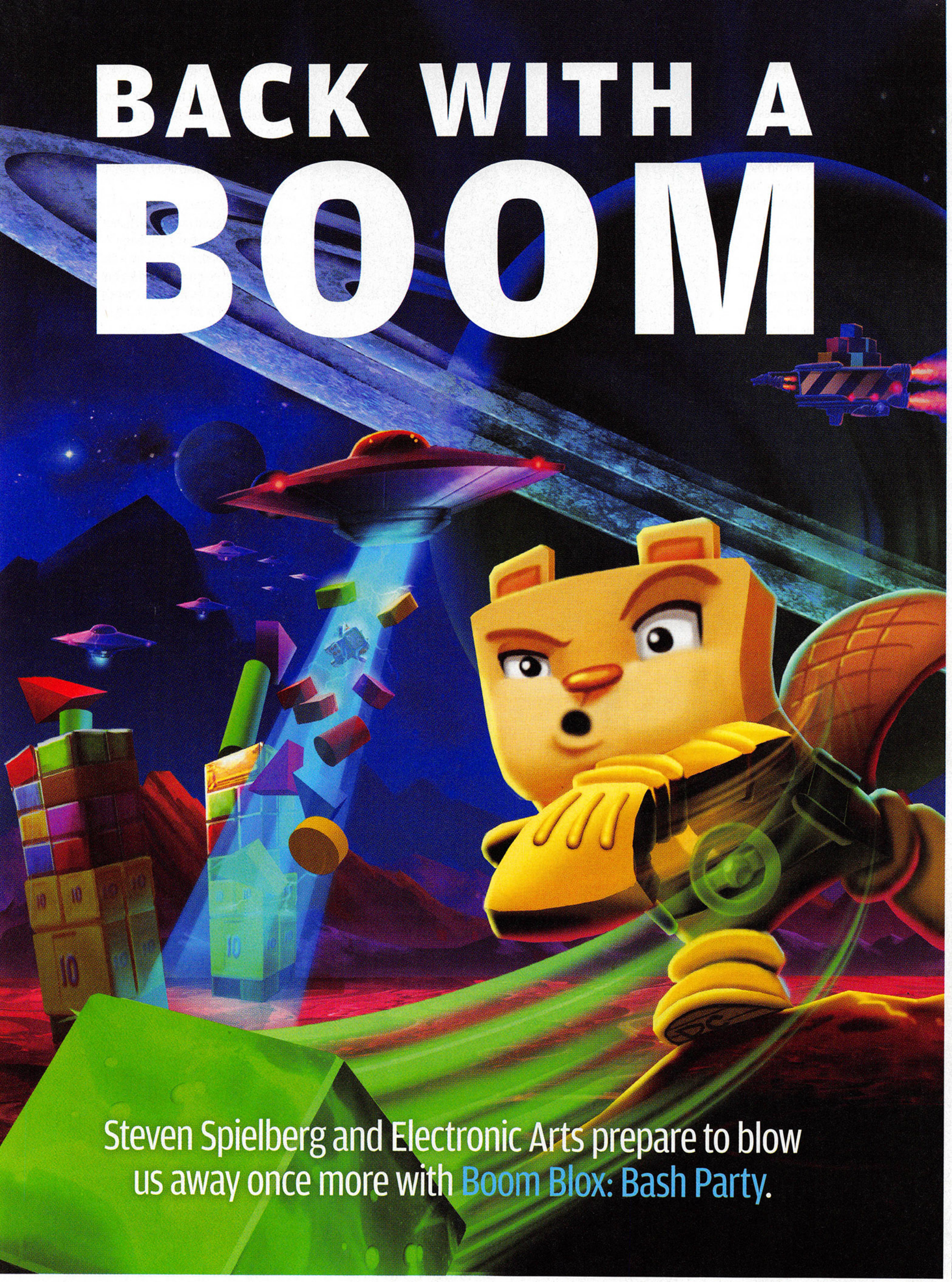


[Above] Can you trust the Trust agents? [Right] You can see the Drudge's influence on our world.



[Left] The balconies in the Training Complex map offer a great vantage point for snipers. That said, is a submachine gun really the best sniping weapon?

BACK WITH A BOOM



Steven Spielberg and Electronic Arts prepare to blow us away once more with Boom Blox: Bash Party.

BY STEVE THOMASON

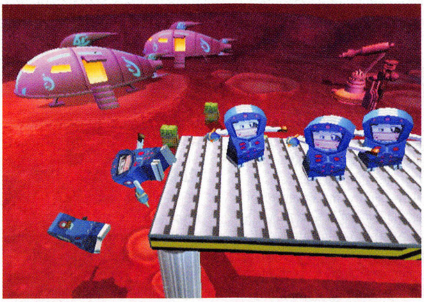
LAST YEAR'S BOOM BLOX typifies Wii at its finest. The brainchild of legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg, it's accessible without being shallow, it's a blast to play with friends, and it makes smart, effective use of motion controls to offer an experience not possible on any other platform. Part puzzle game, part virtual toy box, the title revolves around the simplest of concepts—having fun with building blocks. No matter who you are, it turns out there's something primordially satisfying about stacking them up, knocking them down, or blowing them to smithereens. As Amir Rahimi, the game's producer, points out, "That's what makes Spielberg Spielberg—the ability to put his finger on what's compelling for just about every human being on the planet."

Put us on record for the opinion that teaching cows how to use ray guns is a bad idea.

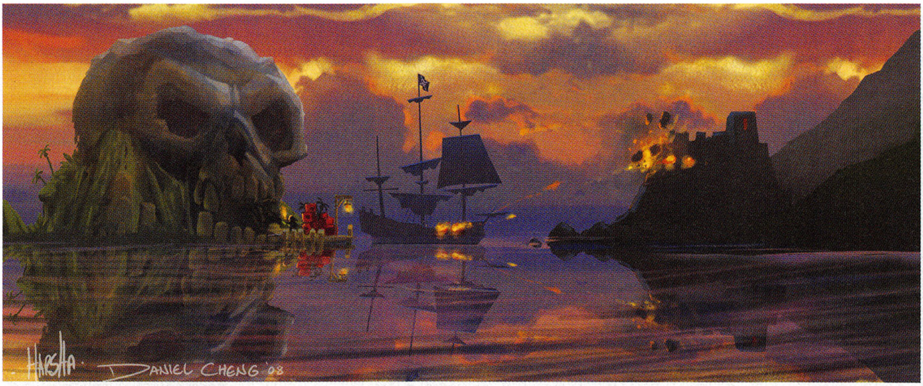
Fortunately, both critics and the wider gaming populace agreed, prompting Electronic Arts to green-light a sequel—entitled Boom Blox: Bash Party—for release this spring. That may seem like a quick turnaround considering that the first Boom Blox came out just last May, but Rahimi—senior producer this time—says Spielberg and the team hit the ground running. "Even after the original game had already gone into production, Steven kept calling us with new ideas," recalls Rahimi. "It quickly became obvious that there was a lot more we could do with this, so the team was anxious to get to work on a follow-up."

As the subtitle suggests, much of that work is going into Bash Party's multiplayer component. "We believe that Boom Blox was one of the top social games for Wii—the social gaming platform—and we've really tried to tee off on that aspect with Bash Party," explains Rahimi. "The single-player aspect is still important, and we're keeping that just as robust as in the original game. But we're blowing out the multiplayer stuff and delivering a lot more content." That means approximately twice as many versus modes, more than 400 brand-new levels, and the addition of competitive team-based play. According to Rahimi, the studio's approach was, "Let's cherry-pick the best compulsions and game modes from the first Boom Blox, get rid of the ones we know didn't work so well—like the hose—and let's add a ton of new mechanics." All told, the senior producer says there will be more than two dozen new ways to interact with the game's blocks.

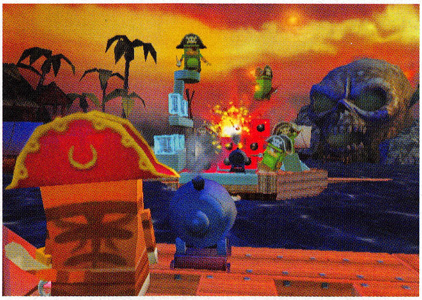
The development team is also making significant additions



[Right] If you perform exceptionally well, you can now earn a better-than-gold medal.



[Right] The visuals are a bit more sophisticated than the first game's.

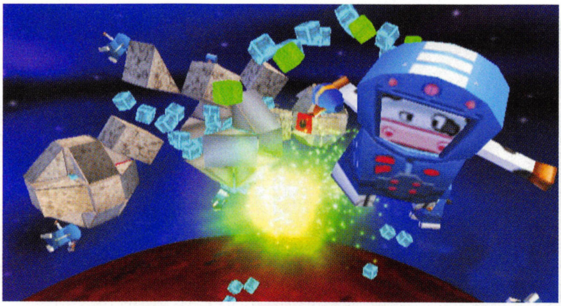


to what was already a very robust physics engine. As in the first game, blocks move and respond to your various inputs precisely as they should, affording the festivities an extraordinary level of sophistication. But two of Bash Party's four new worlds fundamentally alter the relationship between action and reaction. Pirate World includes a number of challenges that take place underwater, and many of Space World's stages are devoid of gravity. Naturally, these twists allow for all sorts of new possibilities and require you to think differently about how you approach certain interactions. The same holds true for the introduction of cylinders and wedges; blocks are no longer restricted to cubic shapes as they were in the original Boom Blox. To mix things up even further, there are new special block types, as well. One example is the Virus block—when you hit it with a ball, this orange parallelogram of doom will infect any adjacent blocks, causing them to self-destruct and potentially set off a chain reaction throughout the entire structure. On the less calamitous side of things, there are transparent Push blocks, which propel other blocks that pass through them, sort of like an airstream. Conveyor blocks provide similar potential for a bit of extra movement. Also worth noting is that unlike the original game, Bash Party lets you interact with the adorable critters that populate each stage just as you would with the blocks. They're even built into the levels on occasion, leading to some pretty comical (if a bit sadistic) situations.

PARTY FAVORS

Our hands-on time with Bash Party revolved around a couple of the game's most intriguing new tools. First up was the slingshot, which lets you grab onto a block by holding the A Button, then pull back the sling in 3-D space by moving the Wii remote before releasing A to send the block flying (see the "The Sling's the Thing" sidebar for a visual representation of how it works). You can move the sling up or down, left or right, and the farther you pull it back, the greater the velocity with which the block will be flung. As with all of the returning tools, the controls feel very natural and the sensitivity is spot-on—this team has the Wii remote dialed in like few other third-party developers.

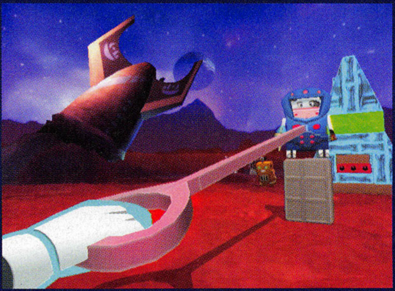
The slingshot is a perfect example of how a single play mechanic can lend itself to lots of applications. After letting us get the hang of the tool with some basic puzzle boards, Rahimi challenged us to a few rounds of Boom Blox-style minigolf. Using the slingshot, your goal is to score the most points by getting one or more pucks to the flag (or, failing that, one of the larger-yet-less-valuable goals strewn about the course). You can bank your shots off of anything in the environment (including your opponent's puck), though certain courses require



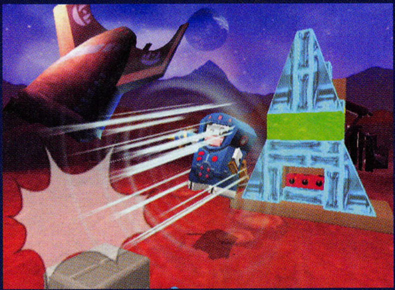
Bash Party features a new achievement system that rewards you for certain accomplishments. We can only hope that sending heifers to the far reaches of the galaxy is one such accomplishment.

THE SLING'S THE THING

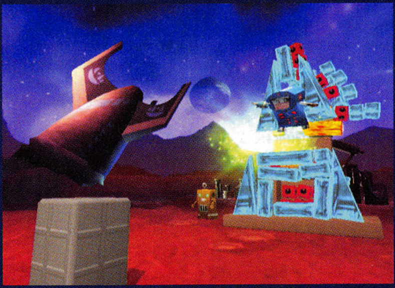
One of Bash Party's coolest new mechanics is the slingshot. To illustrate how it works, let's help this bovine astronaut to her spaceship.



First we attach the sling to Bessy here by highlighting her with the cursor and pressing the A Button. We then extend the band by pulling back on the Wii Remote.



The farther you pull back, the greater the force behind your shot. Bessy's a big ol' gal, so we better give it some oomph!



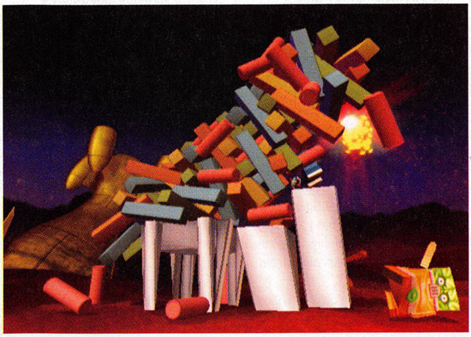
Blast off!

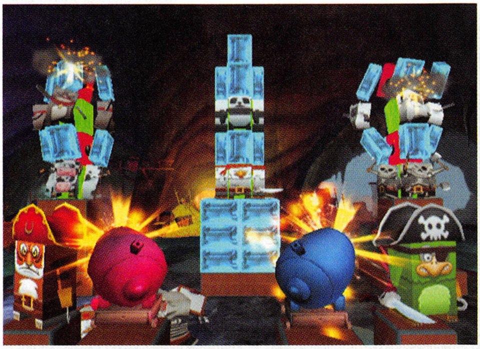
even-more-elaborate tricks, such as hitting your puck into a Push block with just enough power to launch it at the flag without overshooting. Not surprisingly, the game's senior producer dominates the links, but we fare a bit better in the next slingshot-centric mode, entitled Elimination. Inspired by the billiards game Cutthroat, this four-player free-for-all has you trying to knock each other's pucks off the playfield. While your humble author quietly experimented with using wandering cows as projectiles, Rahimi and his EA compatriots duked it out and immediately began to form grudges amongst themselves. As a result, yours truly was the last man standing. "You find in this mode that whoever keeps their mouth shut usually has the best chance of winning," notes Rahimi with a laugh.

The other new tool introduced during our demo was the paint ball, which you can throw at blocks to change their color. Its uses tend to be more puzzle-oriented; one mode has you matching the colors of three or more blocks, for instance, to make them disappear. That causes the blocks on top of them to fall, and if three more like-colored pieces come in contact with each other, they too will vanish. It's somewhat reminiscent of Tetris Attack or Bejeweled, but the fact that all of the shapes are three-dimensional and governed by realistic physics makes for a fresh (and typically less predictable) take on a classic idea. Plus, there are occasional opportunities to bounce the paint ball, allowing you to change the color of multiple blocks with a single throw.

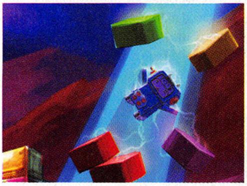
That's but a miniscule sampling of the new modes and mechanics in Bash Party, and as mentioned previously, the team is retaining many of the choice components of the original Boom Blox. Of course, they're also taking the opportunity to blend old and new. Consider one of NP's favorites from the first game, the Tiki Tower Topple. As before, each player's objective is to tally as many points as possible by knocking blocks off some elaborately constructed citadel. But the introduction of Push blocks and Conveyor blocks, especially when

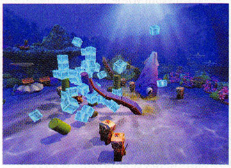
Bash Party debuts eight new character types (including parrots), each with their own unique behaviors.

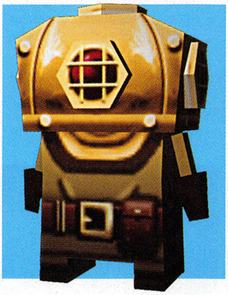


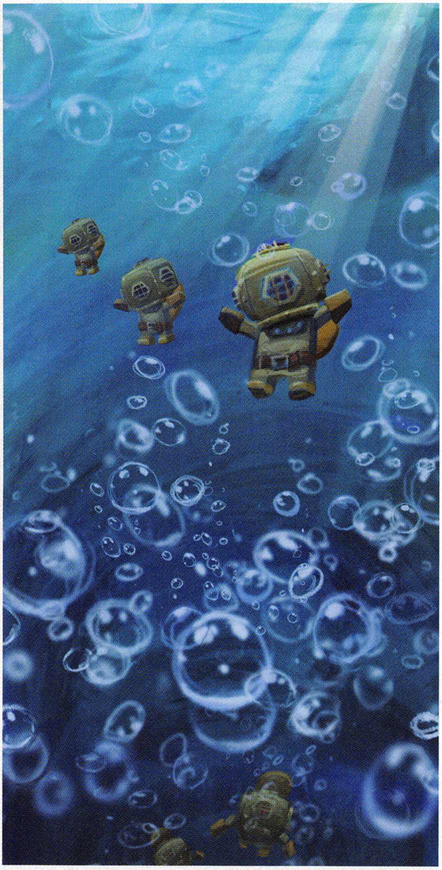


[Above] Little known fact: the real reason pandas are endangered is because parrots and tigers fire cannons at them.









combined with Chem blocks (the explosive blue variety that explode on contact with other Chem blocks), sets up some intriguing possibilities for chain reactions. "By integrating classic Boom Blox game types with some of the new mechanics, you get a really cool new flavor," enthuses Rahimi.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Bash Party's single-player mode follows the same basic formula as its predecessor—each themed world offers a unique quest and the developers have tried to inject as much variety as possible to keep things fresh. In the Pirate World, for instance, one underwater stage has you flicking treasure blocks to the surface while a giant squid attempts to demolish your booty. (You can ignore the beast and simply salvage as much treasure as possible, or you can try to destroy his tentacles with Chem blocks.) Later you'll be tasked with defending your newfound riches from rival swashbucklers by engaging in ship-to-ship battle (using the Wii Remote pointer to aim your cannons). Space World, meanwhile, has you doing everything from mining asteroids to protecting a lunar colony from UFOs.

As with the original Boom Blox, successful completion of your goals requires not only a steady hand and an analytical mind, but also the willingness to experiment. In fact, the extra diversity provided by all of the new tools and mechanics means that even more than in the first game, you can tackle each stage in lots of different ways. "There isn't one 'correct' solution where you try to figure out what the level designer had in mind," says Rahimi. "Five different people can approach a stage in five different ways and still be able to succeed." Trying new things can also lead to the discovery of Boom Bux, hidden currency that you can spend to unlock new levels or new Create-mode elements.

Yes, Bash Party lets you once again create your own levels, and the editor is even more robust this time; it consists of the exact same tool set that EA's designers used to construct all of the game's pre-existing stages. Better yet, you can now upload your creations via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection and share them with the world. (The original game's online functionality was limited to direct transfer via Friend Codes.) There are some amazing videos on YouTube of classic game tributes and Rube Goldberg machines that people made with the first Boom Blox, and it will be great to actually play such concoctions. Players will be able to rate the online offerings, and a search function will let you organize them by ranking, keyword, etc. To get the ball rolling, as soon as the game ships the development team will start working on additional levels to be made available for download. Of course, we expect our readers will put everyone else to shame with some brilliant NP-inspired master works. (Hint, hint.)

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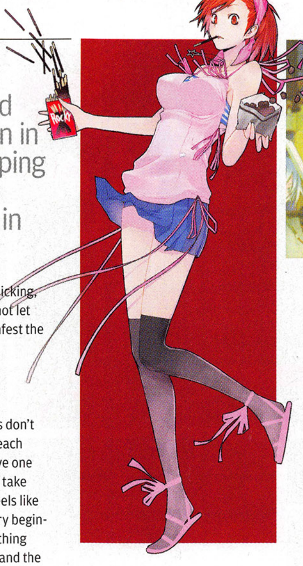
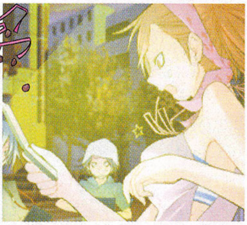
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor takes DS users on a twisted trip to Japan.

LIFE IN THE BIG CITY

BY DAVID F. SMITH





A lot of gamers reading this might like the sound of a permanent vacation in downtown Tokyo. Shopping in Akihabara, hanging out in Shibuya, watching the girls in Harajuku...where's the downside?

In the real world, maybe there wouldn't be one. Tokyo can keep you busy for a very long time. In Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor, though, the goal is to get out of town as soon as possible.

It helps to know something about Tokyo's geography to grasp what's going on in Atlus's latest strategy-RPG. Although the greater Tokyo area is massive, stretching all around Tokyo Bay on its south side and fading into rural areas everywhere else, the city core is defined by a big, roughly drawn circle—the Yamanote line, which is also the name of the train line that loops around the edge of central Tokyo. You can travel outside it and still be in some pretty built-up areas, but inside the loop, you're definitely in the big city.

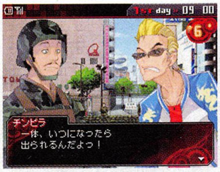
In Devil Survivor's near future, everything inside the loop is cut off from everything on the outside. The government has chosen the Yamanote railway tracks as the defining border for a blockade of central Tokyo, cutting off all the roads, the rail lines, the power, and even cell-phone service. You can't really blame them for panicking, though. They'd prefer to not let the demons get out and infest the entire country.

SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE

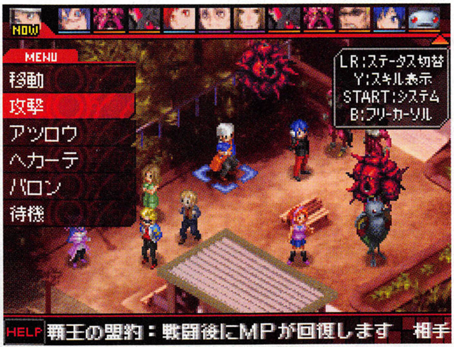
The Megami Tensei games don't often connect directly to each other, but they always have one thing in common: They all take place in something that feels like real life, at least at the very beginning. Soon enough, something strange usually happens, and the story begins to peel back the skin of the ordinary world, but that grounding in reality is what makes the games interesting. Games like Final Fantasy take place in completely imaginary worlds. Megami Tensei isn't about the real world, but you might notice a haunting resemblance or two.

In Devil Survivor, the gate to hell has opened up somewhere in downtown Tokyo, and nothing good is coming out. Where do you fit in? Well, just before the blockade went up, a distant cousin gave you a peculiar gift—a new piece of portable electronics (which looks almost exactly like a Nintendo DS). This "COMP," as it turns out, is built to play a very dangerous game. Through the COMP, you can make deals with the demons and try to get them to fight for you, which ought to increase your chances of survival considerably.

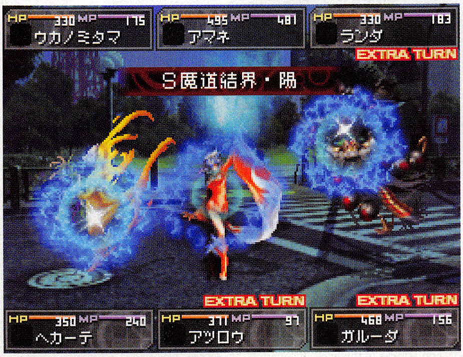
Communication with demons is the basic element that's been common to the Megami Tensei games for more than 20 years. In fact, the series introduced features that were later popularized by the Pokémon games. By negotiating with the demons wandering around the city, you convince them to join the party and fight for you.



チンピラ
一体、いつになったら
出られるんだよっ！



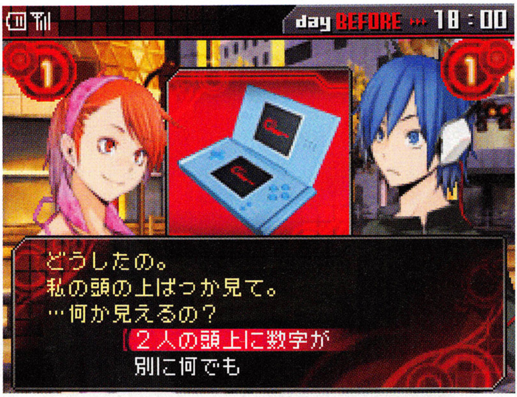
HELP 覇王の盟約：戦闘後にMPが回復します 相手



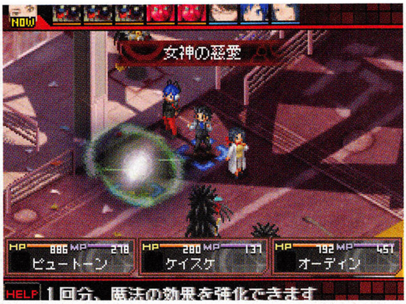
All screens are from the Japanese version. [Above] Combat features an old-school first-person viewpoint, but the 3-D graphics are anything but retro.

GUITAR HEROICS

To make sure their game didn't sound like every other RPG out there, the Devil Survivor team brought in a composer from way outside the games industry. Takami Asano, the soundtrack composer for Devil Survivor, has dabbled in game music only a few times over the years. His full-time job is playing guitar for Godiego, a Japanese/British pop-rock band that's been steadily recording and performing since the '70s. They've never had a hit in the US, but they're well known in their home country—their single "Monkey Magic" was covered on Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan 2, the sequel to the game that inspired Elite Beat Agents.



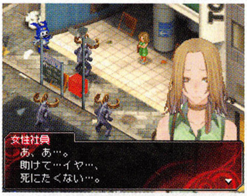
どうしたの。
私の頭の上ばっか見て。
…何か見えるの？
２人の頭上に数字が
別に何でも

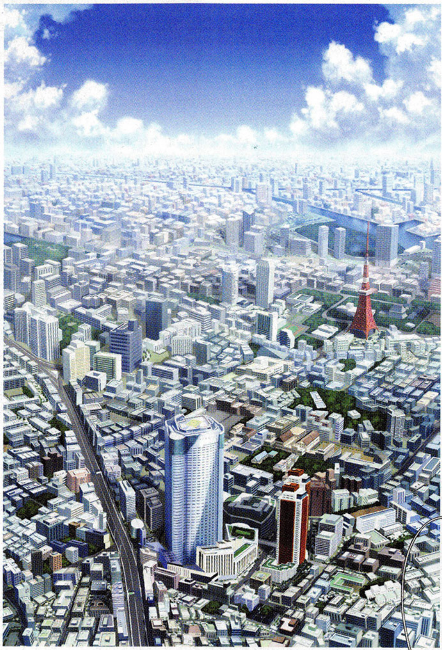


HELP 1回分、魔法の効果を強化できます

[Left] The design of that COMP there looks awfully familiar. Who knew the DS could talk to demons?

[Below] Demons aren't the only danger inside the blockade—some human residents aren't coping all that well either.


女性社員
あ、あ…。
助けて…イヤ…、
死にたくない…。



Once they become part of your forces, you can trade them, sell them, or fuse groups of demons together to create new, more powerful spirits and monsters. Catching 'em all won't win you any Gym Badges here, but it will give you a good shot at escaping the city alive.

MATTERS OF TIME

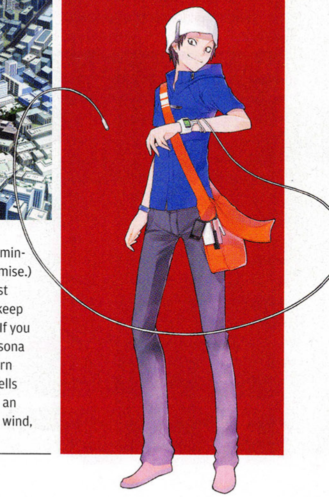
Devil Survivor takes those familiar mechanics and grafts them onto a combat-intensive strategy-RPG. Each party member that's equipped with a COMP can bring two demons from their collection into battle, and those trios become the units that move around the isometric battlefield. When a unit attacks a team of opponents, they trade blows on a first-person battle screen that looks just like the ones in Dragon Quest or Golden Sun. Traditional-RPG fans should feel right at home.

On the nuts-and-bolts level, Devil Survivor was designed to move quickly so players could find time for short game sessions on the go. Some strategy games feature long, complex battles that drag out for ages, but the average battle in Devil Survivor should be over in 10 or 15 minutes. (According to director Shinjiro Takada, who cut his teeth working on the cult-favorite Langrisser and Growlanser strategy games, his design team originally wanted battles to top out at only five minutes, but they had to compromise.)

Another holdover from past Megami Tensei games helps keep things moving at a good clip. If you played, say, Persona 3 or Persona 4, you know how the Extra Turn system works. Most of the spells and attacks in the game have an elemental attribute—fire, ice, wind,

WELCOME TO THE PARTY

The cast of Devil Survivor—designed by up-and-coming Japanese illustrator Suzuhito Yasuda—is a motley crew of refugees trying to find a way out of the city. The main character begins the game with a couple of old friends to get his back, and he'll eventually team up with a Shinto priestess-in-training, an online "cosplay idol," an amateur computer programmer, a bullied teenage boy with a chip on his shoulder, and the surviving singer from an indie rock 'n' roll band. Some of them may seem like unlikely allies, but given the situation, you'll need all the help you can get.



whatever. Likewise, nearly every demon is vulnerable to one of those elements. Hit an opponent's weak spot, and you're rewarded with another opportunity to attack and finish them off. Of course, your demons also have weaknesses, so it takes careful planning to keep the bad guys from racking up extra turns of their own.

FINGERS ON THE TRIGGER

Besides the encounters and battles that are central to the story, Devil Survivor offers plenty of opportunities to fight additional battles, collect more demons, and build up more experience. In the background, though, there's always a time limit looming. Not long after the game begins, the government sets a deadline—if the demons haven't been dealt with in seven days, the government is going to cure the illness by killing the patient. In other words, everything inside the blockaded area will be bombed flat.

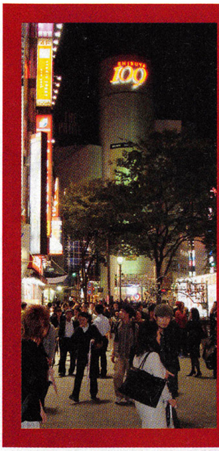
It's a pretty grim prospect, and in fact, Atlus promises this is going to be a pretty grim game. Most of its earlier handheld Megami Tensei spin-offs—like the DemiKids RPGs for the Game Boy Advance—were pretty light stuff aimed at a very young audience. Devil Survivor, despite its cartoony character designs, is made with older players in mind. Though it may not be as dark as the darkest games in the series, Takada says it's just a step or two behind them.

Exactly how dark the story's climax becomes is partially up to the player, though. Devil Survivor's plot has several branching points where your actions have a lasting effect, so it's not as simple as just watching the story unfold on autopilot.

APOCALYPSE SOON

How could it all end? We'll have to wait to see. One thing this series has never been is predictable—the original Shin Megami Tensei RPG, which traumatized Super Famicom fans in 1992, had the nerve to make nuclear strikes all across Japan. And that was only halfway through the game.

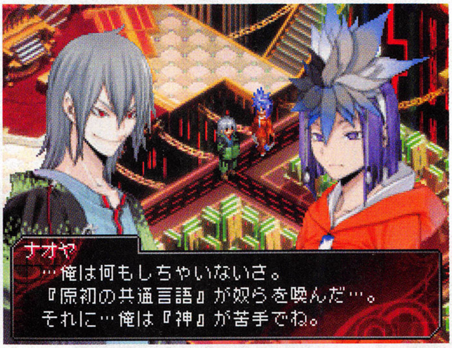
If the creators at Atlus still have that kind of nerve, we could be in for something pretty special in this game. You wouldn't want to live in this version of Tokyo, but it will surely be worth a visit when Devil Survivor arrives this summer.



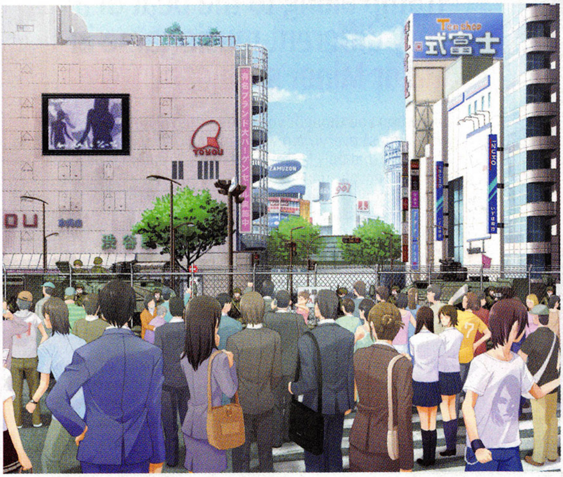
SEEING THE SIGHTS

Devil Survivor's quest takes players all over Tokyo, and of course, several areas feature easily recognized landmarks. A few names and logos have been changed to protect the innocent, though—the Shibuya 109 department store is now Shibuya 901, for instance, and there's a different set of three letters in front of the massive HMV music store in Ikebukuro. Despite the small changes, the game's creators insist that their locales are very true to life—even the infamous Kabuki-cho red-light district in Shinjuku.

ヤマタノオロチ
ヤマタノオロチ
EXTRA TURN
Sマカラカーン
EXTRA TURN
EXTRA TURN
EXTRA TURN
ヒーロー
モスマン

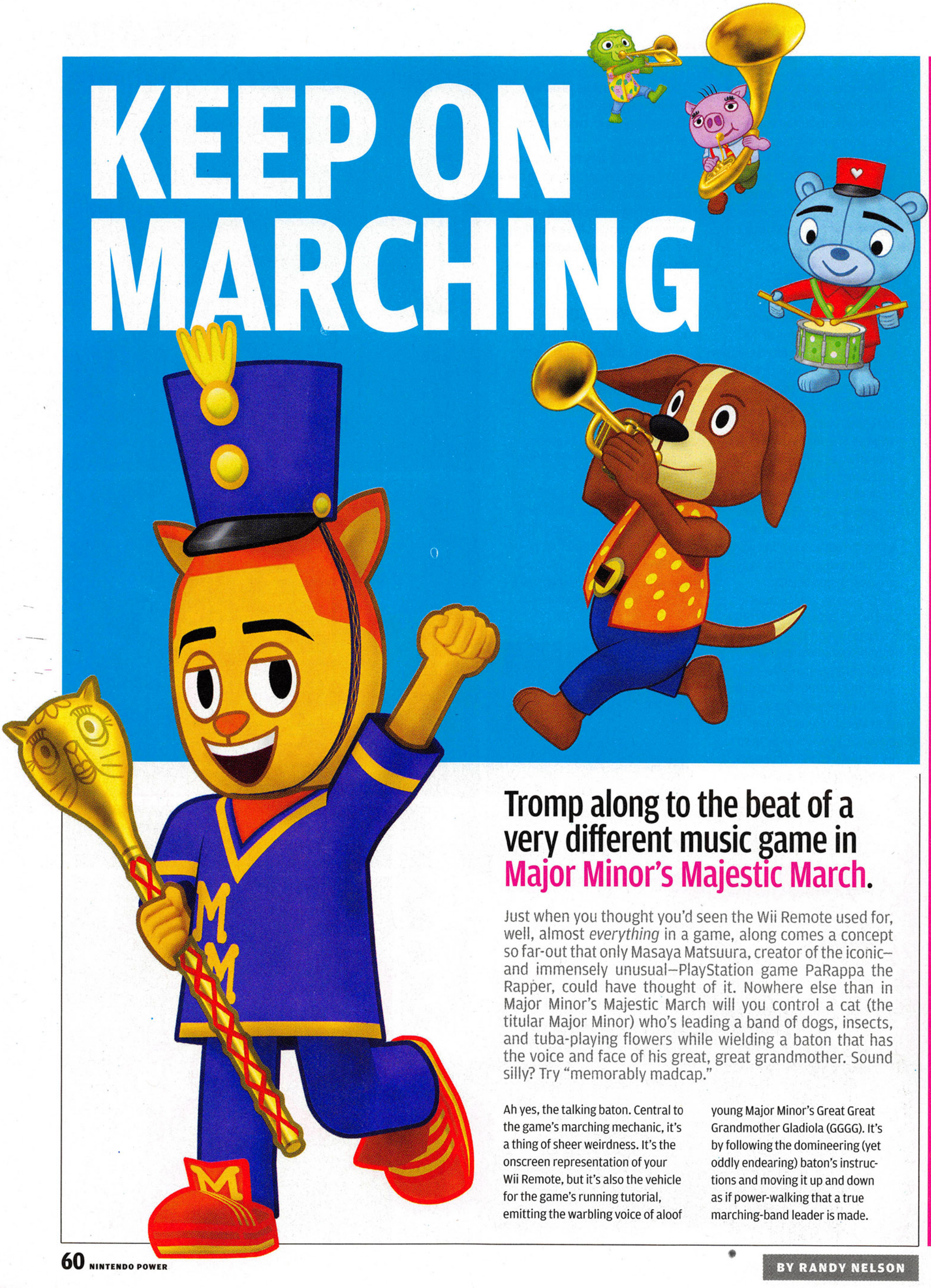


ナオヤ
…俺は何もしちゃいないさ。
『原初の共通言語』が奴らを喚んだ…。
それに…俺は『神』が苦手でね。



To the left we have a familiar intersection in Shibuya. Usually it's so crowded that you wouldn't even notice if a gate to hell had opened up.

KEEP ON MARCHING

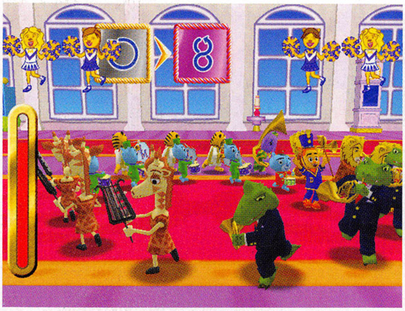


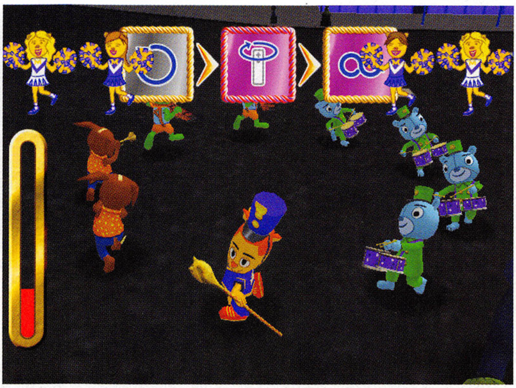
Tromp along to the beat of a very different music game in Major Minor's Majestic March.

Just when you thought you'd seen the Wii Remote used for, well, almost *everything* in a game, along comes a concept so far-out that only Masaya Matsuura, creator of the iconic—and immensely unusual—PlayStation game PaRappa the Rapper, could have thought of it. Nowhere else than in Major Minor's Majestic March will you control a cat (the titular Major Minor) who's leading a band of dogs, insects, and tuba-playing flowers while wielding a baton that has the voice and face of his great, great grandmother. Sound silly? Try "memorably madcap."

Ah yes, the talking baton. Central to the game's marching mechanic, it's a thing of sheer weirdness. It's the onscreen representation of your Wii Remote, but it's also the vehicle for the game's running tutorial, emitting the warbling voice of aloof young Major Minor's Great Great Grandmother Gladiola (GGGG). It's by following the domineering (yet oddly endearing) baton's instructions and moving it up and down as if power-walking that a true marching-band leader is made.

BY RANDY NELSON



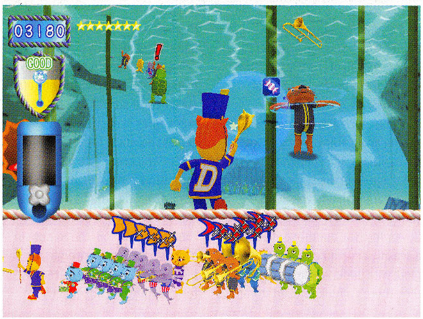


[Above, Right] Special drill minigames add variety to the action.

As you parade through the game's seven stages, you won't wield your baton in rhythm to someone else's drum—you'll use it to set the tempo and recruit band members as you strive for the best sound possible. Keeping everyone in line isn't easy; they all demand a certain pace, but it's easier when you know they have a soft spot for jelly beans, which are doled out via the B Button.

BAND MANAGER

"In this game, I have been very interested in trying to convey the concept of managing a musical performance," Matsuura says, almost certainly not referring to the tossing of candy. "I'm sure that many of those who will play this game will be kids, and I earnestly want to introduce them to the importance and joy of teamwork and leadership, all through the medium of music," he stresses, adding, "These are themes that even I, at [my] age, continue to enjoy (and stress over!) as a member of society."

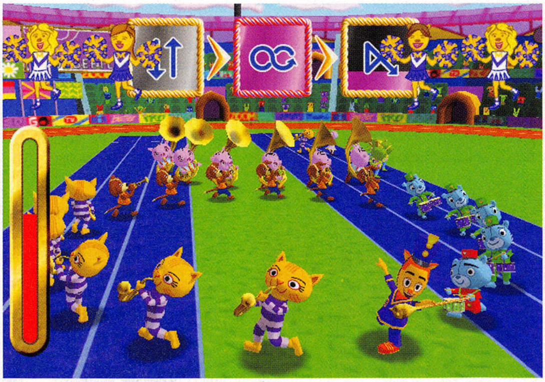


Major Minor's Majestic March—or M4, as Matsuura calls it—isn't the simple button-matching drill of old. Keeping the tempo of the game's various songs is less rigid than in some rhythm games, although you'll know when you're doing poorly (or your arm's simply getting tired): the music begins to go off-key and GGGG exclaims, "Warning!" through your remote's speaker. (You can hold your thumb over it to muffle her if it bugs you—but you won't have to do that if you're playing well, will you?)

Just as important as tempo is volume—not as it pertains to how loud the music is, but rather to the size of your band. As you 1-2-3-4 along each level's path, would-be musicians line the way—you have to tilt your remote-turned-baton in their direction to recruit them, but that means you must work those tilts in to the song's rhythm. Point to an onlooker at the right time and he'll jump in line, adding to the layers of the song. The larger the band line, the bigger the sound, so be sure it sounds good!

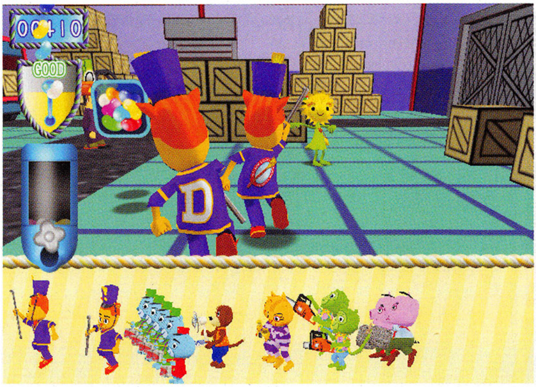
SOUNDING OFF

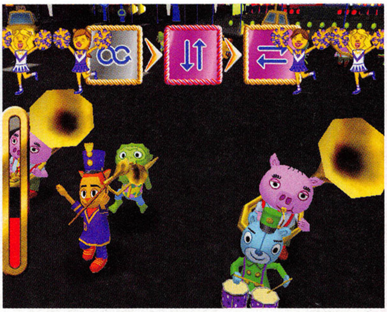
Speaking of the sound—and the songs themselves—it's interesting to note that, unlike Matsuura's other games, this one uses well-known licensed and public-domain music. Why the switch? "There is no other reason than wanting to use tunes that people were



VOTE for the nice PARTY
THE Natural
Choice
Good
Guy
KEN KOA

[Left] The gameplay of Major Minor's Majestic March is pretty simple, but when you're managing the needs of pigs, dogs, bears—and are those convict cats?—things can get hairy.





[Left] You'll be seeing double in the game's multiplayer mode. Two players can join forces to split the marching and recruiting duties, or play tag-team style to compete for the most points.

familiar with," says the game's creator. "But I'm very confident that with M4 we have managed to make these old songs sound so brand-new."

Keeping your band sounding good is important, but marching well is, too. Step it up too fast, and your band will tire out and, eventually, abandon you. Plod along, though, and you'll run out of steam, requiring a replay of the section.

The same mechanic used to rope in band members can, thankfully, be used to snatch up power-ups found floating along the path. Jelly beans (which you can store up then throw to the band when you need some extra oomph), cake, sunshine, and more can help you out. You'll have to watch out, however, as there are also detrimental items that will, for instance, cause you to lose a band member if you mistakenly grab them.

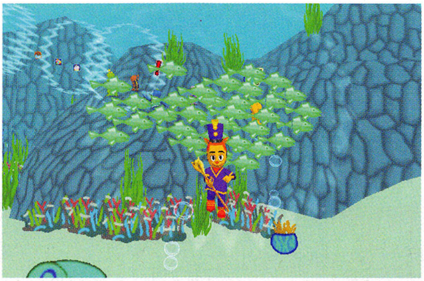
DRUM BREAKS

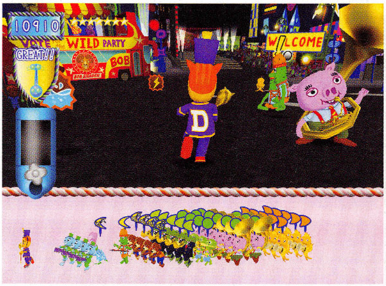
Since keeping the rhythm with the up-down Wii Remote motion can get tiring, each of the game's levels contains a break point, before which you can attempt to deftly snag all of the whistle icons to perform a perfect halting of the band.

Things such as drawbridges raising and traffic passing prompt these breaks. It all depends on the stage—and the stages are quite varied. In one you'll make your way through the woods to a flower festival; another unfolds in a seaside amusement park, complete with underwater sequences; then there's a funk-infused stomp through a factory, in which your baton is replaced by a piece of pipe.

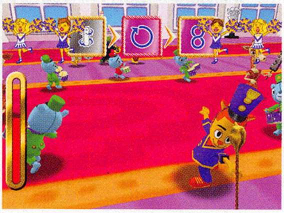
You'll also get to take a break from the standard up-down-left-right action during Drill Mode minigames in each level. At certain points in the stages, your troupe will break into a circular formation and you'll move the Wii Remote as indicated by onscreen icons to perform a dancelike routine. You'll spin the remote in a circle, draw a figure eight, or move it wildly in every direction, for example. It's not exactly baton twirling, but it's close. "Unfortunately, I'm male and have little to no knowledge and experience of baton-twirling," Matsuura explains. "Just the thought of me dressing in a skirt and leotard made me burst into laughter."

Additional modes include two multiplayer subgames that you unlock after completing the solo story. In the first, one player controls the tempo while the other reins in band members and power-ups. The other mode has both players switching off to see who can get the most musicians to join the line.





No matter where Major Minor ends up—be it a celebrity birthday bash or under the sea—he's gotta keep on marchin'!



MARCH OF TIME

Sure to turn your view of music games on its head (and give your baton arm one heck of a workout), M4 is a game Matsuura hopes will appeal to all ages and skill levels. "For the people who were dating in the days of PaRappa, who have become mothers and fathers, I would like to think that M4 is a chance for them to enjoy an all-new music-game experience together as a family," he muses. "On top of that, I like to think that it's a chance for everyone to share friendship and forget the feelings of hardship we're experiencing amongst this growing environment of uncertainty that we live in nowadays." Before marching back to work on the game, he says he'd "also like to make a special appeal to kids, who have inherited their parents' PaRappa-playing DNA and who I hope are ready to take things to the next level!"

ART MAJOR

Masaya Matsuura is known for making some very unique games (see PaRappa the Rapper and Um Jammer Lammy), but they wouldn't have the distinct look they do without Rodney Alan Greenblat. We chatted with the artist about working with Matsuura, the wonders of the internet, and why instrument-playing animals are an analogue to the human condition.

NINTENDO POWER How would you describe your art style? What about it do you feel is a good fit for Wii?

RODNEY ALAN GREENBLAT

My art style is populuxe, colorific, whimsilogical, and wholejoy. Therefore it makes perfect sense on Wii.

What was the creative process like for Major Minor's Majestic March? How much freedom did you have with the designs, what kind of directions did you receive, and how much of the game concept was revealed to you when you started creating the visuals?

It is as if Matsuura-san and his team are planting seeds in the rich dirt of my mind. Some of the seeds are very specific, and are expected to become the useful plants needed to feed the game. Sometimes those plants grow as expected, and other times odd mutations occur. Sometimes Matsuura-san throws in some wild seeds (no one knows where they came from), and they bloom into surprising flowers or weeds. Once in a while I bring in a few of my own sprouted blossoms and if they are acceptable they are added to the garden.

As far as we know, the only games you've worked on are ones created by Mr. Matsuura. What is it you like about working with him, and why do you think your art style is a good match for Matsuura's work?

Actually, a thousand years ago, in the 1990s, I made a few CD-ROM creations of my own. Not really games, but Funscreen, Wonder Window, and Dazzeloids [all for PC/Mac] were without Matsuura-san. When I started working with him I was excited by the surprises and challenges that he gave me. I think Matsuura chose me because my work has a funky and sometimes clunky handmade look. In the world of games that have a high-tech, realistic, or clinically cute look, Matsuura could see something original and personal in my work.

Is there any reason why you haven't worked with other game creators? Would you like to?

None of them have asked me. If all karma points in that direction, why not?

No matter what's going on, your art always seems to be perpetually happy. Is that something you consciously strive for? What's the secret to delivering that feeling? Are you usually a happy person?

Yes, I am a happy person. I love my family and my friends and my home. I am blessed and eternally grateful for the opportunities I am given to do the wild and wonderful things I do. Striving for happiness is a mistake many people make. I am happy now, and I let the future unfold as it does. In this way, if my work is honest to my nature, it will radiate my happiness in a tangible way.

Where did you get inspiration for your designs featured in this game?

As I said, the inspiration for the game came from the seeds planted by Matsuura-san and his team. The colors, world, and character forms, are part of the vast vocabulary of design that I have been building ever since I began my life as an artist.

In the early sketches we saw, Major Minor was a human, not a cat. How did he evolve into a cat? What other forms did you experiment with?

I originally wanted to do a game with human main characters, but Matsuura preferred animals. He is the leader, so I went with animals.

What is it that you like about using anthropomorphic animals as your characters? How did you select what animal species to use?

It is easier and more humorous to look at the human condition through the analogy of the animal world. When a man plays the trombone, OK, he is a trombone player. When a monkey plays the trombone it is surprising. Questions arise. Why would a monkey play the trombone? What is it about monkeys? What is it about trombones? In the case of Major Minor's Majestic March, Matsuura and his team picked which animals would do what.

What characters in this game are you especially fond of?

Tom the blue-teddy-bear sidekick is a great guy, and I like powerful Great Great Grandmother Gladiola.

Each stage has a different visual motif. How did you aim to make each stage different from the others?

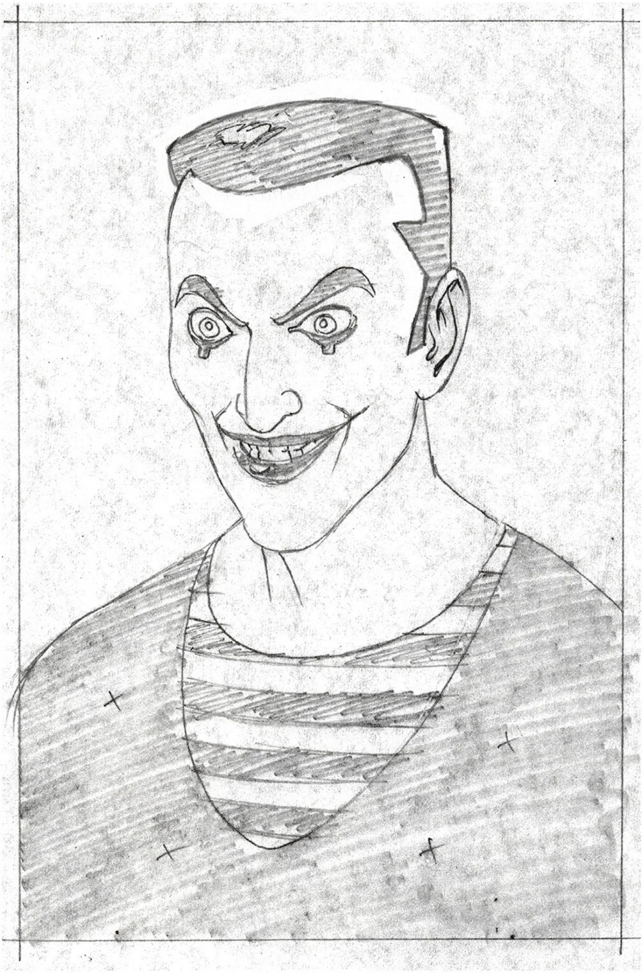
It is really important in game design to have interesting and contrasting locations in each different level. Matsuura-san and his team gave me the situations for each level and my job was to find a fresh way to express it.

Many gamers are familiar with your PaRappa work, which featured, essentially, 2-D characters. Did you approach your designs any differently knowing they'd be rendered in 3-D?

Yes, in my sketches I had to supply views of the characters in at least three directions, and also include a pose of the character at an angle.

Did you have to do any research for the visuals in the game, such as on the musical instruments, for example?

The internet is the fastest, most fantastic, surprising research tool in our world. Not only could I easily get pictures of a sousaphone, but I could find pictures of sousaphones at different angles. Sports stadiums, old European towns, species of flowers, Greek sculpture, all pop up on my computer screen more quickly than I ever could have imagined.

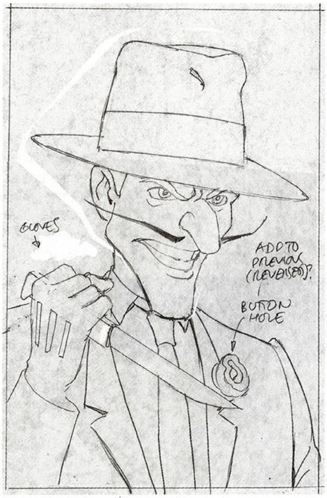


[redacted]

Acclaimed comic-book artist Dave Gibbons lends his talents to Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars—The Director's Cut for Wii and DS.

MAN OF MANY FACES

BY KAISER HWANG



Gibbons especially enjoyed drawing the game's more outlandish characters.

FOR THE BETTER PART of the '80s and early '90s, point-and-click adventure games ruled the roost in PC gaming—and until the advent of Wii and Nintendo DS, the PC remained the best platform for the genre, due to its mouse-and-keyboard controls. However, both of Nintendo's current systems are perfect for a classic adventure experience; on Wii you have a mouse-like cursor that can be moved around the screen effortlessly, and on the DS you can simply touch anywhere as needed.

With the technological foundation in place and an audience perfectly suited to the Broken Sword series, it's to our delight that Ubisoft is bringing Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars—one of the most revered adventure games of all time—to both Wii and DS this March. Both game versions go well beyond a simple port of the 1996 game; there's a slew of additional content to make even the casual Broken Sword fan take notice.

The expanded narrative is the most significant new element of this director's cut. Giving more insight into the events before the start of the original game, as well as how they tie into the later Broken Sword titles, the new plot elements should make an already-gripping story into one that feels fully fleshed out. And for you purists out there, take note: the original Broken Sword developer, Revolution Software, is making the game, so this director's cut truly is that.

Beyond the new locations, story, and puzzles that use the DS and Wii controls in unique ways, the newly created artwork—in particular, the facial animations—is of special interest. Drawn by legendary comic artist Dave Gibbons (of *Watchmen* fame), the facial animations promise to bring a new level of emotional depth to the characters. Given how hard it is for 3-D game models to effectively show emotion, utilizing art hand-drawn by one of the world's most respected figures can't be a bad thing. We had a chance to chat with Gibbons about his involvement in the upcoming title.

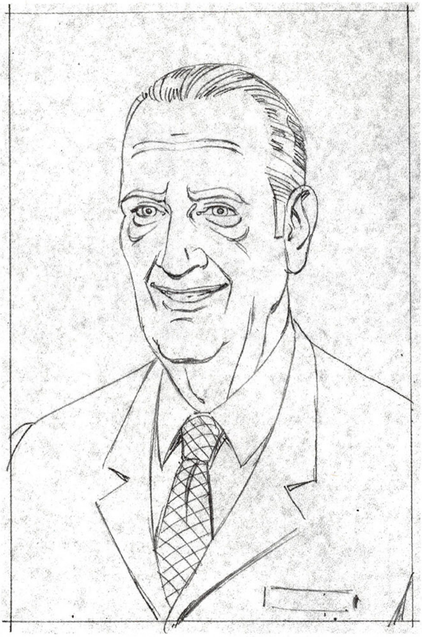
NINTENDO POWER How did you get involved with this project? Were you a fan of the Broken Sword series?

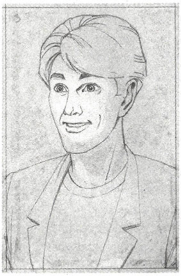
DAVE GIBBONS Well, I've known [Revolution Software founder] Charles Cecil for quite a time now, and I had a really good working relationship with him and his team on Beneath a Steel Sky [for PC], which was a predecessor of the original Broken Sword series. And I really liked the enthusiasm of everybody up at Revolution; it was a lot of fun to work with them. You know, what comes through is the kind of humor and ingenuity of the people at Revolution. And I think they're prescient in a way; I mean, this deals with a lot of the same subject matter as *The Da Vinci Code*—a similar kind of action—but they got there a long time before [*The Da Vinci Code* author] Dan Brown and everybody else. I have to be honest; I'm not a great game player, but I think that, graphically and [in] its kind of atmosphere and its pace, that Broken Sword is a really entertaining series.

Can you tell us a bit about how you approached updating the game's characters?
My job really was to, from the tiny little sprites onscreen, provide headshots of the characters in the game and to make them emote as they spoke various bits of dialogue and as they interacted together. So that consisted of looking at the reference and looking at the actual sprites that had been created for the game and just trying to build on them—make sure that all the faces had character and that they were all different and that they were consistent with what had already appeared in the game.

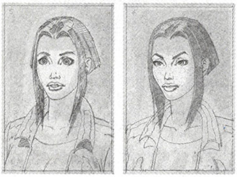
Which of the game's characters was your favorite to work on?
Well, George and Nico are the main characters, so we had to work very closely on them. We see them go through a whole range of emotions, and that's always interesting to try and make characters come to life like that. It's strange—when you work with them closely enough and take them through these ranges of expression, you feel you know them very, very well. Although some of the secondary characters who are a bit broader...you know, George and Nico are very much the kind of good-looking leads, as we quite often find in comics, as well—some of the secondary characters, the comic-relief characters or the sinister characters, can sometimes have more appeal just because they are such caricatures. So, I couldn't really choose a favorite; I enjoyed working with them all.

It seems like you've been doing more and more as a writer in recent years—do you have any interest in writing a video game?
When I first became interested in comics—which was a long, long time ago—I had no idea that they were written and drawn by two separate people; I thought you just came up with the whole thing. So the fact that I've worked most of my life drawing comics rather than writing them is just the way the business goes. But I do enjoy writing and I do enjoy plot—that's one of the things that really interests me when it comes to writing. I like to do character, but plot I find is a real intellectual challenge. So for that reason a video game might be quite an interesting thing to do. I haven't actively pursued it, but who knows?





As you can see, the characters—especially main characters George and Nico [below]—show a wide range of emotions.



What are your thoughts on video games in general as a storytelling medium?
It's really interesting that to me there seems to be a huge convergence of storytelling media: films, games, comics, novels, TV—everything seems to be coming together. And I think there are possibilities in games to tell stories or get the reader involved in stories, which you really can't do in any other media. And I think now that the technology, the software, and the possibilities have become so real, you really feel like you're taking part in a movie. So it's a lot of fun, and certainly I'm really interested to see what's happened both with the Broken Sword game, and to mention *Watchmen*, the games that have spun out of that. I think it's a way that you can really enrich a story.

Are there any other video game series that you think would be fun or interesting to work on?
You know, I don't really play video games very much, I must admit. My son does, and he would be probably the person I would ask about this before I embarked on any kind of video gaming writing career. But there certainly [does] seem to be...almost as broad a range of games out there as... of movies and comic books. It's no longer that it has to be just a shoot-'em-up or just a puzzle game; the best games have an element of both and also don't have to involve big muscley guys with guns anymore than comics have to involve that. So I think there's some interesting possibilities.

What other projects do you have on the horizon? Anything else with games?
Well, at the moment a lot of my time is taken up with the promotion of *Watchmen* the graphic novel, and the book that I wrote called *Watching the Watchmen*, which is about how we created the graphic-novel series, Alan Moore and I. That's taking up a lot of my time at the moment, and I'm just finishing off on Broken Sword. And after that, who knows? I haven't specifically got anything in games in mind, but I found it very interesting also to be a consultant on the various Watchmen games, and I'm learning more and more about them, so who knows? Something like that might happen.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be and why?
[Laughs] Patience, I think, would be the superpower to have.

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COOL
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new heights in
next great platform
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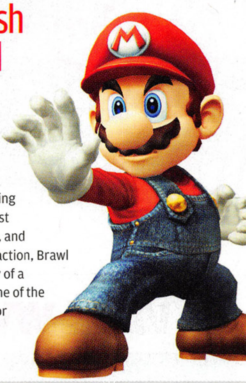
THE 2008 NINTENDO POWER AWARDS

Two decades ago, Zelda II: The Adventure of Link took home the Game of the Year trophy in Nintendo Power's first-ever awards, and every year since, the NP staff has taken great pride in honoring the titles that have become milestones in gaming history. For months our team has analyzed 2008's best Wii and Nintendo DS games, and now our final votes—along with yours—have been cast. So without further ado, in this special 21st edition of the Nintendo Power Awards we proudly present the new classics that will forever join history's elite games.

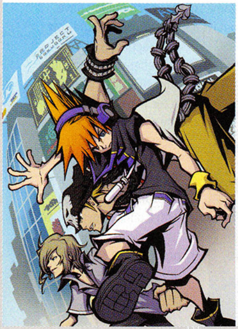
Wii GAME OF THE YEAR:
Super Smash Bros. Brawl



It's a rare game that can snag an award over a Mario Kart title as fun as the one for Wii, but Brawl is *that* good. With system-defining graphics and music, a vast selection of deep modes, and unbeatable multiplayer action, Brawl proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that Wii offers some of the best games ever made for hardcore players.

READERS' PICK	**THE NOMINEES**
7%	Animal Crossing: City Folk
1%	Bully: Scholarship Edition
11%	Mario Kart Wii
6%	No More Heroes
3%	Rock Band 2
72%	Super Smash Bros. Brawl

NINTENDO DS GAME OF THE YEAR: The World Ends with You

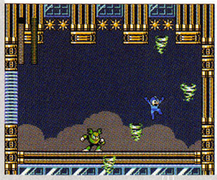


The DS continues to inspire some of the most innovative games being made today, and in 2008 few games exemplified the handheld's trailblazing spirit like The World Ends with You. The Square Enix RPG didn't just introduce one or two new features; the entire game was built on fresh ideas that are so fun, we'll be astonished if they don't pop up in future RPGs.

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
6%	Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia
11%	Chrono Trigger
11%	Final Fantasy IV
32%	Kirby Super Star Ultra
12%	Professor Layton and the Curious Village
29%	The World Ends with You

WiiWARE GAME OF THE YEAR: Mega Man 9

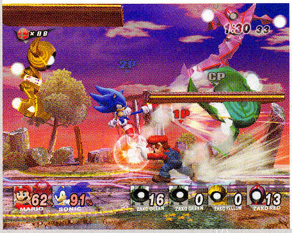
The WiiWare service had a great start, with a steady output of quality releases that included some of the year's best games. Mega Man 9 tops them all because, in addition to its fun and challenging gameplay, the title is a fantastic example of the breadth of game styles made possible by direct download—the game would have been considered too risky to ever sell in stores. Here's hoping more creative ideas are given a chance thanks to Mega Man 9's success.



READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
13%	Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a King
4%	LostWinds
39%	Mega Man 9
24%	Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People
7%	Tetris Party
13%	World of Goo

BEST Wii GRAPHICS: Super Smash Bros. Brawl

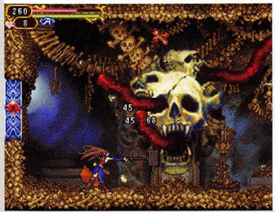
Brawl has joined Super Mario Galaxy as one of the two best examples of how good Wii games can look. This multiplayer masterpiece paired amazingly detailed stages (beautiful lighting, eye-popping explosions, incredibly intricate character models, and near-perfect animation) with a fun and creative mix of visual styles. Whether the fight takes place on a flat, 2-D retro stage or in a superdetailed realistic environment, Brawl is always a sight to behold.



READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
3%	Castlevania Judgment
17%	Okami
18%	Sonic Unleashed
51%	Super Smash Bros. Brawl
4%	Tomb Raider: Underworld
8%	Wario Land: Shake It!

BEST DS GRAPHICS: Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia

Castlevania titles were already known for high production values and striking gothic visuals, but Order of Ecclesia trumped other recent installments by dropping their anime-influenced look in favor of a more detailed, realistic approach. There have been some tremendous 3-D games on the DS, but for our money, a well-polished 2-D title suits the system best, and few know how to deliver amazing 2-D visuals like Koji "Iga" Igarashi and his team of vampire hunters at Konami.



READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
13%	Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia
4%	Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen
26%	Final Fantasy IV
5%	GRID
17%	Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword
34%	The World Ends with You

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE:
Super Smash Bros. Brawl (wii)

The soundtrack to Brawl is a greatest-hits collection of beloved Nintendo tunes for the ages, reimagined and composed by a group of game-music all-stars the likes of which has never before been assembled. There is something here for every Nintendo fan, from rousing renditions of the most famous Zelda and Mario themes to obscure tunes from cult-favorite titles. This is the ultimate collection of Nintendo music, and it doesn't get better than that.

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
6%	Chrono Trigger (DS)
4%	Final Fantasy IV (DS)
2%	Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon (wii)
6%	No More Heroes (wii)
63%	**Super Smash Bros. Brawl (wii)**
19%	The World Ends with You (DS)

BEST SOUND/VOICE ACTING:
No More Heroes (wii)

One of the coolest and funniest games of the year wouldn't have been nearly as memorable without its appropriately over-the-top voice acting, especially the rebel-without-a-clue punk prattle of lead character Travis Touchdown. The sound effects are also exceptional, providing every hit of the Beam Katana with a satisfying buzz and every suplex with a punishing thud. And the game earns bonus points for its clever use of the Wii Remote speaker as a phone!

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
7%	Bully: Scholarship Edition (wii)
21%	Call of Duty: World at War (wii)
20%	No More Heroes (wii)
17%	Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)
28%	**Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People (WW)**
7%	Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2 (DS)

BEST MUSIC/RHYTHM GAME:
Rock Band 2 (wii)

Music games have never been bigger than they were in 2008, which made for one of our most hard-fought categories. Our decision ultimately came down to a Wii battle of the bands, with Rock Band 2 edging out Guitar Hero: World Tour due to its slightly superior presentation and drumming. With one of the best track lists in the genre and a full set of quality instruments, it's hard to imagine the band-in-a-box experience getting much better.

8,075
21,669
4x

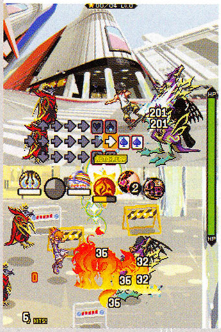
READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
4%	Dance Dance Revolution Hottest Party 2 (wii)
4%	Guitar Hero On Tour (DS)
40%	**Guitar Hero World Tour (wii)**
27%	Rock Band 2 (wii)
9%	Samba de Amigo (wii)
17%	Wii Music (wii)

BEST ADVENTURE GAME:
No More Heroes (wii)

True to the punk attitude that infuses every second of No More Heroes, the game is rough around the edges. But what NMH does well, it does *really* well, and its rebellious don't-tell-us-we-can't-do-this-in-a-game twists and turns have endeared the game to players who appreciate a title that punches through the status quo. Few titles have embraced Wii's innovative sprit as completely or recklessly as this, and the result is pure entertainment from start to finish.

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
11%	Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney (DS)
7%	Bully: Scholarship Edition (wii)
15%	Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia (DS)
23%	No More Heroes (wii)
25%	**Okami (wii)**
19%	Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People (WW)

BEST RPG:
The World Ends with You (DS)

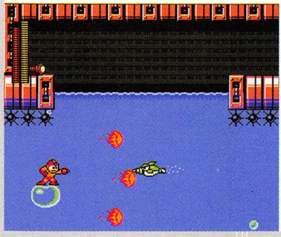


In a genre that generally plays it safe, The World Ends with You threw the rulebook out the window and gave RPG fans the most daringly original title in years. With a unique combat system that deftly uses the microphone, both screens, stylus, Control Pad, and buttons, plus offers one of the year's most compelling stories, players won't soon forget this groundbreaking epic.

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
17%	Chrono Trigger (DS)
2%	Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen (DS)
13%	Final Fantasy IV (DS)
27%	Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood (DS)
11%	Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World (Wii)
30%	The World Ends with You (DS)

BEST SHOOTER/ACTION GAME:
Mega Man 9 (WW)

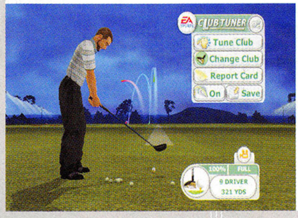
Even though Mega Man 9 was created to play like a decades-old game, its blast-and-jump action stands up to the best that modern gaming has to offer. And although we at Nintendo Power fondly remember similar titles from the good old days, there's much more to Mega Man 9 than nostalgia. It's the ultimate test for elite Wii players of all ages, with incredibly challenging—but fair—gameplay that gets even better with optional downloadable extras.



READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
3%	Bangai-O Spirits (DS)
4%	Blast Works: Build, Trade, Destroy (Wii)
33%	Call of Duty: World at War (Wii)
44%	Mega Man 9 (WW)
5%	Metal Slug 7 (DS)
11%	Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword (DS)

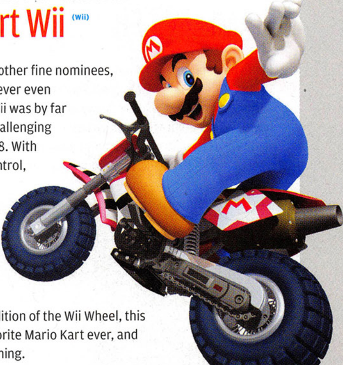
BEST SPORTS GAME: Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09 All-Play (Wii)

In 2008 EA delivered two of the best sports games we've ever played on a Nintendo system: Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09 All-Play and Madden NFL 09 All-Play. It was almost too close to call, but upon further review, Tiger topped his EA teammate. With fantastic one-to-one motion controls, a deep career mode, robust online play, and lots of ways to customize the game to suit players of all skill levels, this is Wii's best sports game.



READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
20%	Madden NFL 09 All-Play (Wii)
56%	Mario Super Sluggers (Wii)
2%	New International Track and Field (DS)
12%	Sega Superstars Tennis (Wii)
5%	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09 All-Play (Wii)
5%	We Love Golf! (Wii)

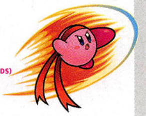
BEST RACING GAME:
Mario Kart Wii (Wii)



With respect to the other fine nominees, this category was never even close—Mario Kart Wii was by far the most fun and challenging racing game of 2008. With unmatched drift control, the welcome inclusion of bikes and tricks, a wealth of addictive local and Wi-Fi multiplayer options, and the surprisingly fun addition of the Wii Wheel, this may just be our favorite Mario Kart ever, and *that's* saying something.

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
1%	Ferrari Challenge: Trofeo Pirelli (Wii)
2%	GRID (DS)
88%	Mario Kart Wii (Wii)
9%	Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity (Wii)

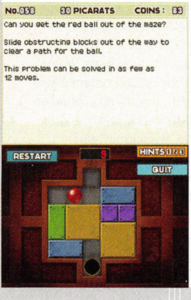
BEST PLATFORMER: Kirby Super Star Ultra (DS)



The Kirby formula of action, platforming, eating, and stealing powers has always been fun, but it's rarely been presented this well, or in a package as chock-full of value as this one. We adore Wario Land: Shake It!, but after experiencing the breadth and depth of gameplay modes in Kirby Super Star Ultra, we can't deny the pink puffball top honors when he's at his very best.

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
2%	Crash: Mind over Mutant (Wii)
15%	de Blob (Wii)
33%	Kirby Super Star Ultra (DS)
3%	Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars (Wii)
29%	Sonic Unleashed (Wii)
18%	Wario Land: Shake It! (Wii)

BEST PUZZLE GAME: Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)



Can you get the red ball out of the maze?

Slide obstructing blocks out of the way to clear a path for the ball.

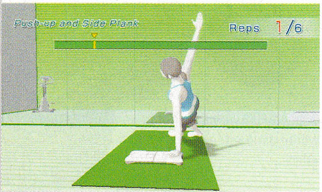
This problem can be solved in as few as 12 moves.

Every nominee in this category offered top-notch puzzle play, but Professor Layton and the Curious Village gave us the year's best brain-twisters *plus* one of our favorite new characters (Layton himself), and presented an engaging story beautifully told through stylish cinemas that hark back to classic Miyazaki films. This is a gem of a game that charms all who play it.

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
23%	Boom Blox (Wii)
16%	Dr. Mario Online Rx (WW)
30%	Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)
14%	Tetris Party (WW)
17%	World of Goo (WW)

BEST ALTERNATIVE GAME: Wii Fit (Wii)

In the true spirit of this category, Wii Fit gave 2008 its defining new experience, supplanting Wii Sports as the flagship title for a new generation of players. Many longtime gamers also took notice, either embracing a video game as the way to finally push themselves to work out, or simply enjoying the neat-o Balance Board minigames. With Wii Fit, Nintendo sent one of its strongest signals yet that it isn't afraid to take big risks on big ideas, and we love a daring, experimental Nintendo.



READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
50%	Animal Crossing: City Folk (Wii)
13%	Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2 (DS)
36%	Wii Fit (Wii)

BEST NEW CHARACTER: Travis Touchdown—No More Heroes (Wii)

Although No More Heroes didn't give us 2008's most well-crafted story (much of the game's charm lay in its wild, disjointed swings from one plot point to another), no character made a bigger impact than the title's larger-than-life star, Travis Touchdown. With his questionable morals; messy apartment; and geeky love for games, anime, and wrestling, Travis isn't the usual golden-boy hero—he's the kind of guy we'd love to hang out with. (That is, as long as he's not chopping through crowds of assassins with his Beam Katana.)

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
7%	Apollo Justice – Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney (DS)
16%	Blob – de Blob (Wii)
20%	Neku – The World Ends with You (DS)
12%	Professor Layton – Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)
23%	Shade – Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood (DS)
22%	Travis Touchdown – No More Heroes (Wii)

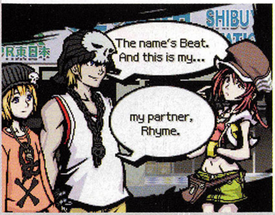
BEST MULTIPLAYER:
Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)

Brawl was built to provide one of the most full-featured and long-lasting multiplayer experiences available. It accommodates every kind of player with a wide variety of characters and stages, plus an incredible number of customizable battle options and match types, including handy tournament brackets for large groups. You can even play co-op through the lengthy single-player adventure and Event-mode challenges. There's rarely been a better way for friends to spend time in front of the TV.

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
2%	Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates (DS)
7%	Guitar Hero World Tour (Wii)
17%	Mario Kart Wii (Wii)
6%	Rock Band 2 (Wii)
67%	Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)
1%	Tetris Party (WW)

BEST STORY/WRITING:
The World Ends with You (DS)

This innovative RPG features a wonderfully compelling story that is just as unorthodox as its maverick new gameplay features. This isn't the usual save-the-world adventure, but an intimate quest that focuses on the personal struggles of its characters. Neku, the protagonist, grows over the course of the game, and the relationship that develops between he and Shiki, the lead female character, is pretty touching. No RPG fan should miss out on this well-told tale.



READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
21%	Chrono Trigger (DS)
7%	Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen (DS)
19%	No More Heroes (Wii)
17%	Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)
3%	Robocalypse (DS)
33%	The World Ends with You (DS)

BEST ONLINE FUNCTIONALITY:
Mario Kart Wii (Wii)

Mario Kart Wii became a contender for the online-gaming crown just by adding 12-player Wi-Fi races to the series' legendary multiplayer action. But the developers didn't stop there. Instead they piled on features such as worldwide rankings, exchangeable time-trial ghost data, online tournaments that introduce unique new challenges, and even a dedicated Wii Channel to keep track of it all. Whew—it's no wonder we didn't get enough sleep last year!

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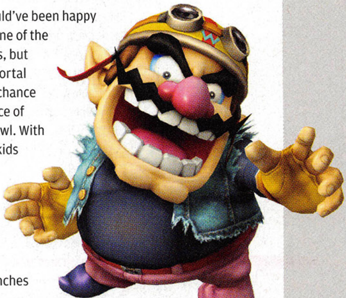
7th

READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
24%	Animal Crossing: City Folk (Wii)
3%	Bomberman Blast (WW)
10%	Guitar Hero World Tour (WW)
1%	Madden NFL 09 All-Play (Wii)
55%	Mario Kart Wii (Wii)
6%	Rock Band 2 (Wii)

BEST FIGHTING GAME:
Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)

Any other year, we would've been happy to hand this award to one of the other worthy nominees, but let's face it: no mere mortal fighting game stood a chance against the godlike force of Super Smash Bros. Brawl. With accessible action that kids can mash buttons to and depth for pros to master, Brawl is the perfect way for any fighting fan to spend a few hundred afternoons trading punches with friends.



READERS' PICK	THE NOMINEES
2%	Bleach: Dark Souls (DS)
2%	Castlevania Judgment (Wii)
5%	Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution 2 (Wii)
87%	Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)
1%	The King of Fighters: The Orochi Saga (Wii)
2%	WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 (Wii)

OVERALL GAME OF THE YEAR:
Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)

The key word with this game is "unprecedented." Brawl became Nintendo's fastest-selling title of all time, with nearly 1.5 million copies sold in just its first week. It packed in more content than perhaps any fighting game ever, including a wealth of stages, characters, options, and modes (The Subspace Emissary—Brawl's bonus single-player adventure—might've earned an award nomination as its own game). And Brawl boasts an unparalleled collection of beloved Nintendo tunes composed by a who's-who of legendary game musicians. This title is the ultimate love letter to all things Nintendo, and will continue to see fierce multiplayer competition in homes for years to come. More than for any other game, 2008 will be remembered for Super Smash Bros. Brawl.

READERS' PICK	**THE NOMINEES**
4%	Animal Crossing: City Folk (Wii)
1%	Bully: Scholarship Edition (Wii)
1%	Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia (DS)
2%	Chrono Trigger (DS)
1%	Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a King (WW)
0%	Final Fantasy IV (DS)
1%	Kirby Super Star Ultra (DS)
0%	LostWinds (WW)
6%	Mario Kart Wii (Wii)
2%	Mega Man 9 (WW)
3%	No More Heroes (Wii)
3%	Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)
2%	Rock Band 2 (Wii)
4%	Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People (WW)
55%	Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)
0%	Tetris Party (WW)
14%	The World Ends with You (DS)
2%	World of Goo (WW)

PAST GAME *of the* YEAR WINNERS

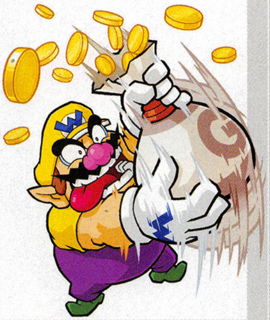
1988	Zelda II: The Adventure of Link (NES)
1989	Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (NES)
1990	Super Mario Bros. 3 (NES) / Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Fall of the Foot Clan (GB)
1991	Battletoads (NES) / Metroid II: Return of Samus (GB) / Super Mario World (SNES)
1992	Mega Man 4 (NES) / Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins (GB) / Street Fighter II: The World Warrior (SNES)
1993	R.C. Pro Am II (NES) / The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening (GB) / Mortal Kombat (SNES)
1994	Donkey Kong Country (SNES)
1995	Chrono Trigger (SNES) / Donkey Kong Land (GB) / Wario Land (VB)
1996	Super Mario 64 (N64) / Super Mario RPG (SNES) / Donkey Kong Land 2 (GB)
1997	GoldenEye 007 (N64) / Harvest Moon (SNES) / Donkey Kong Land 3 (GB)
1998	The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (N64)
1999	Donkey Kong 64 (N64)
2000	The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask (N64)
2001	Super Smash Bros. Melee (GCN)
2002	Metroid Prime (GCN)
2003	The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker (GCN)
2004	Metroid Prime 2: Echoes (GCN)
2005	Resident Evil 4 (GCN)
2006	The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (Wii/GCN)
2007	Super Mario Galaxy (Wii)

NOTE: Some years had just one overall winner, while in others there was one for each system.

SPECIAL STAFF AWARDS

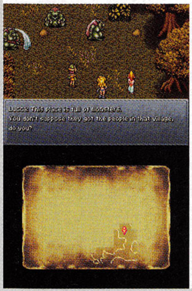
THE CHRIS SLATE "GOOD SAMARITAN" AWARD: Wario Land: Shake It!

In a year without a big new Mario or Zelda title, gaming's greediest grouch proved that he really does care by stepping in with one of the most Nintendo-y games of 2008. Wario's first Wii adventure didn't have sizzling 3-D graphics, multiplayer options, or Wi-Fi features, but it schooled most modern-style games with classic platform-hopping, enemy-squashing Nintendo goodness. Wii's extra horsepower showed us how good a 2-D game can look on a console, with super-detailed character sprites and jaw-dropping animation. Excellent motion controls and a collection of some of the best bosses in recent memory topped off one of my favorite games of 2008.



THE CHRIS HOFFMAN "RETRO REVIVAL" AWARD: Chrono Trigger

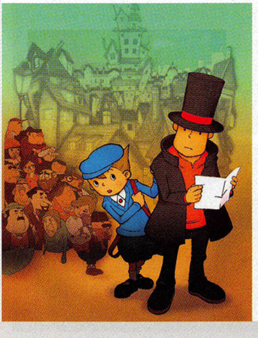
It should probably be a criminal offense that Chrono Trigger didn't pick up any awards from the NP crew, or from the readers for that matter. I'm generally all for honoring new, innovative games rather than updated re-releases, but this isn't just any old game: this is freakin' Chrono Trigger, easily one of the best RPGs ever made. The game looks and sounds at least as good as anything made today, and it's enhanced with hours of new content and plentiful bonus features. I know I should be finishing more recent RPGs instead of playing Chrono Trigger again, but I just can't pull myself away—the story, gameplay, and characters are just that compelling, and the game is almost infinitely replayable due to its multiple endings and New Game+ feature. Now if only Square Enix could get the band back together and deliver a true sequel....



Lucca: This place is full of monsters.
You don't suppose they got the people in that village, do you?

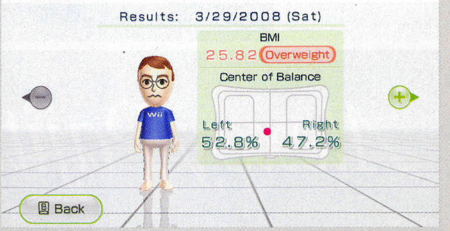
THE JUSTIN CHENG "MY BRAIN HURTS" AWARD: Professor Layton and the Curious Village

Perhaps Professor Layton and the Curious Village wasn't as robust a game as, say, The World Ends with You, but it's easily my favorite of the year. The combination of its unique, Hayao Miyazaki-esque visual style and its mind-bending puzzles is fantastic—it's the most edutaining game I've ever played. Sure, I got stuck from time to time, but I always wanted to work through the problems because the game and its myriad memorable characters (particularly protagonists Layton and Luke) were so engaging. Bring on the sequels!



THE STEVE THOMASON "LIVING LONGER" AWARD: Wii Fit

My favorite game of the year was The World Ends with You, but Wii Fit actually changed my life. And not just from the humiliation of appearing pantsless in the magazine. Its inviting, gamelike approach eased this perennial couch potato into a regular exercise routine, and though I've moved on to other means of working out, that never would have happened without Wii Fit. It's like a gateway drug to a healthier lifestyle. Even my eating habits have been affected—my new snack of choice is raw cauliflower! I'm as wary as anyone when it comes to expanded-audience titles, but any game that can steer me off the path to heart disease is OK in my book.



Results: 3/29/2008 (Sat)
BMI
25.82 Overweight
Center of Balance
Left 52.8%
Right 47.2%

24

Power Profiles

DATE OF BIRTH
August 16, 1955

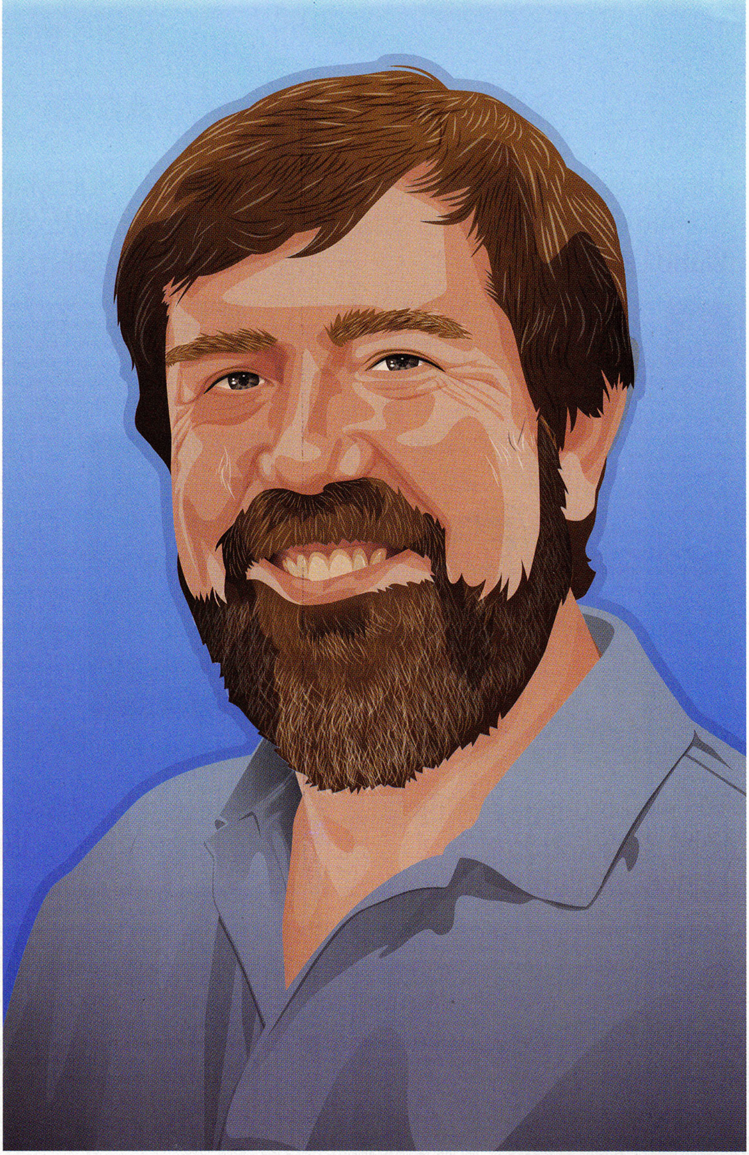
BIRTHPLACE
Moscow, Russia

POSITION
Game designer

BEST KNOWN FOR
Creating Tetris, improving USA/USSR relations

FAVORITE FOOD
Cheese with red grape-based beverages

CURRENT PROJECTS
None



Alexey Pajïtnov

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

In the 1980s the United States and the Soviet Union were in the midst of the Cold War. They didn't trust us and we didn't trust them. Amid this political climate, one man proved to the West that the Russians weren't bad guys after all. No, not Mikhail Gorbachev and his policy of glasnost—Alexey Pajitnov and Tetris. A mathematician-turned-programmer from Moscow, Pajitnov is responsible for designing the genre-defining puzzle game that would eventually become a global gaming empire. Although Pajitnov initially had trouble bringing Tetris to market or getting recognition for his work, within a few years the game became an international sensation, and Pajitnov relocated to the United States, where he used his puzzle-game expertise to work on various other projects. Though gaming fads come and go, Pajitnov's work will likely be enjoyed by gamers for generations to come.

NINTENDO POWER

How did you get into programming, and how did that evolve into being part of the video game business?

ALEXEY PAJITNOV

Well, generally, programming was my specialty. I graduated from my university in applied mathematics, so I was very close to programming. And just after I graduated I started to work as a programmer—as a researcher in the Russian academy of science. It was a computer-science institute called the Dorodnicyn Computing Center at the Academy of Science. And my job was to program some kind of artificial-intelligence tasks. So basically I was a kind of professional programmer from the very beginning. And because the academy of science was kind of an open organization and we had some spare time and freedom for some research, I just liked all kinds of puzzles and mathematical diversions and that's how I got into the games. I wouldn't say it was business, specifically, but I was interested in putting on the computer all different kinds of puzzles and different mathematical ideas and stuff.

When you were younger, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I don't know! Different things. Different stuff. Maybe I wanted to be a fireman when I was four, but I don't remember, exactly. When I was of a reasonable age, I always wanted to be a mathematician because I liked all kinds of mathematical tasks. We'd have some kind of mathematical contests and I'd participate. It was my pleasure.

How did you come up with the idea for Tetris?

There was a more-or-less famous board puzzle called Pentominoes. It's a set of 12 pieces; each of them consists of five squares. All of them are different shapes, but every shape consists of five squares. And this is a wonderful set of pieces to play with, like people play with tangrams and other geometrical shapes. And the original puzzle was to put it back into the box—10 by 6, I believe—and fill it with those shapes. It was like a jigsaw puzzle, but the shapes were all square—no round angles. And there are lots of solutions to this puzzle. But this puzzle was tough; actually, you could spend hours trying to put those pieces together. So I loved this puzzle called Pentominoes, and one day I decided to come up with a two-player board game using these pieces and I wanted to put this board game on the computer. When I started programming this stuff, the idea of a real-time game using such shapes came to me. That's the brief story.

What is the secret to Tetris's success? For that matter, what is the secret to making a great puzzle game?

I don't know the secret of Tetris. It's like cooking—you don't know which exact ingredient was really of key importance for the great meal, you know? But basically Tetris was successful because of its simplicity and its very understandable goal. When you see the screen for five seconds you immediately realize what you need to do. And that is very important, because sometimes puzzles are not very hard, but people just can't figure out how to play them. Tetris was lucky in this respect.

Basically, Tetris was the game of the time. You know, at the time computers were very—at least maybe in people's minds—sophisticated stuff. But the fact that you could play such a simple and understandable game and really enjoy a computer really encouraged many people to get to the computer and keep going. That was a very big part of Tetris's success, I think.

As far as generally what is important for a puzzle game, you know, the problem with the puzzle game is that it's brain-teasing stuff, so it should be kind of challenging for people. But if the challenge is too high, people immediately lose motivation and interest. So the main secret of the puzzle game is to keep yourself on the edge of the challenge as a designer. The designer's task is to be on the edge between being too hard and too simple.

The Soviet Union wasn't really known for games in the 1980s...

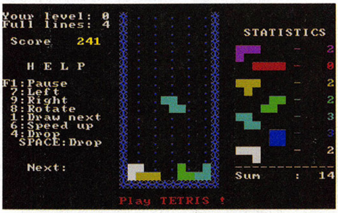
Yes. Not at all. [laughs]

...so what was it like making software there at that time?

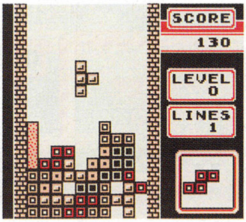
I don't really feel that the Soviet Union helped me create this stuff. It could have been created anywhere in the world. I was really fascinated with the computer and the small puzzles that you could put on computers. But then I had lots of trouble publishing it...it took very many years of effort and troubles to do it. So that was the situation. And what was true in the Soviet Union [is that] we didn't have any game industry, any game business. As a matter of fact, we didn't

GAMEOGRAPHY

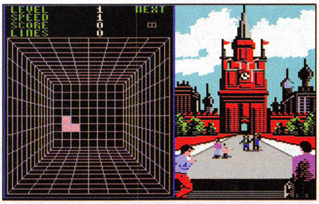
Pretty much everyone has played Tetris in one form or another, but have you tried Alexey Pajitnov's other games? His titles range from Tetris spin-offs like Welltris and Hatris to more-obscure releases such as Pandora's Box.



TETRIS
1986, PC
ORIGINAL GAME CONCEPT AND DESIGN

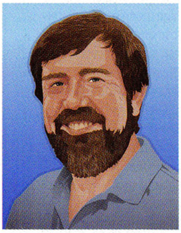


TETRIS
1989, GAME BOY
ORIGINAL GAME CONCEPT AND DESIGN



WELLTRIS
1989, PC
GAME DESIGN

Power Profiles



have any software business at all. Software was absolutely free to copy for everybody everywhere. So basically you couldn't sell your program more than one time because it would immediately become available to everybody.

How did it feel to create a game that was a runaway international success?

That wasn't true at the time that Tetris was created, because there weren't too many computers around. Now there's a computer in every house, but in the '80s when the game was just published it was a different situation. But yes, I was amazed. I was really proud that my game was on every—literally every—single home computer. The first time when it was published they sent us samples of the game, and that was about 12 or 13 different samples for Sinclair, PC, Commodore 64, Amiga, Atari—all kinds of home computers. You can imagine how many there were in those years. And some of them were on [laughs] regular magnetic cassettes, some were on floppy disks—all different media. I was really amazed to see all the samples.

Speaking of which, there have been a lot of versions of Tetris made over the years. Do you have any that stand out in particular?

There was a lot of crap in the pirate world. As far as legitimate versions go, all of them have been kind of approved by me, so basically all of them are really good. But the most important, and the best version, I do believe, was the Game Boy version—the original Game Boy version of Tetris—which was very well done. I do believe it made the game. It made it really successful. And many people have told me, and I believe, that Tetris was a very big part of the Game Boy's success as well. Those two kids were very important for each other. [laughs] I think that...for many years the quality of [other] versions was judged by how close they came to the Game Boy version.

What is the process like coming up with a new puzzle game? Is it something you consciously think about or do ideas just come to you?

It really depends on how my employer works. Sometimes I'm hired to just make a certain kind of game and I concentrate on this particular theme or form. Sometimes I come up with some kind of interesting formula for the game, and that dictates how to work. For example, at one time I approached Microsoft before I started working there. I came up with the idea to have an online [daily] puzzle. And I called it Mind Aerobics—to create a site where people could come every day and get [their] portion of new puzzles to make some kind of mental exercise every morning. I approached Microsoft's game department—it was '95, I believe, or '96—with this game and they were interested. They hired me and for almost two years, maybe a year and a half, I worked on these puzzles. And I came up with lots of different small puzzle games, and this form kind of dictated certain conditions. Basically the puzzles should be very short, allow a wide variety of difficulty, and should be kind of innovative and easy to compose, because you need to come up with content for every day. It's actually a lot of work. So basically, as soon as the format of the game is clear, the rest is just your imagination. That's usually how it works. It's not out of the blue; you have some kind of thing inside yourself to think about. For example, somebody approaches you and asks you to make a game for the controller for Wii, you know? In this case, your idea of the game might come from you, but, you know, it should use your controller appropriately, so that is the frame of your imagination. Basically it's both: the intuition and the frame.

Generally speaking, what is it that you like about puzzles and puzzle games?

Hmm, I don't know. I'm very much into games. I like to play all kinds of stuff. I like the competition. And I like the challenge. But it's really a pity when the games are really violent and aggressive. So my preference is to have an intellectual challenge—that's why puzzles are my favorite genre.

Have you considered making games in other genres?

Oh, yeah. I participated in an action/adventure game. It was a complete failure! [laughs] But I spent lots of energy on that. We published a game called Ice & Fire in the 1990s. It was a complete failure, but I spent lots of time on that one. Yeah. I've tried different genres, but puzzle games are still my favorite.

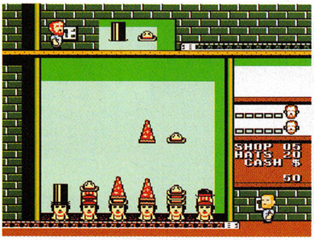
Myself and many other players have had dreams about Tetris. What about you?

Yes, it happens sometimes. What happens to me is sometimes I'm playing the game while I am sleeping, in dreams. I don't have some kind of weird dream about it where the pieces fall on me or something like that, but I just kind of wake up with the impression that I just played the game while sleeping. And personally, I don't find anything wrong with that. It just means that I played too much the evening before.

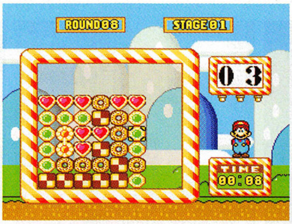
What do you think about the ever-growing casual-games market? What does that mean for you and the types of games you like to create?

It's very good that casual games find their customers, and that the customers find what they actually need. Because all my active working life, I've always struggled with the audience, because basically the puzzle game was kind of a Cinderella genre for many, many years.

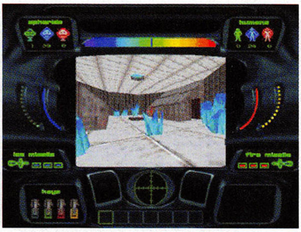
GAMEOGRAPHY



HATRIS
1992, NES
GAME DESIGN



YOSHI'S COOKIE
1993, SUPER NES
PUZZLE DESIGN



ICE & FIRE
1995, PC
GAME CONCEPT, DIRECTOR

Until the middle of 2000, the genre was really, really unappreciated by everybody. But finally the computer became so common and so available that many people decided that it's very good to have very short time diversions from the job. You know, it's five minutes, and it's a simple game without heavy graphics, without really complicated controls, and it's become popular. And that's great; that's what I love to do.

> *"I've always had the impression that all my ideas come a little bit earlier than they're supposed to."*

Have you given any more thought to unique ideas you might want to try on Wii or Nintendo DS?
Lately I don't work too much. If somebody really approached me and made some kind of exact proposal—give me the frame of work, you know?—then I will probably try to come up with something. But I've become a bit lazy lately. [laughs]

How have things changed in the gaming industry since you started, and how have things changed for you?
I've always had the impression that all my ideas come a little bit earlier than they're supposed to. That's why many of my other games weren't really popular—as popular as Tetris, in any case. I used to rush too much, all my life, but frankly I feel that the industry goes the way that I feel it should go. Basically, my picture of my career is that I did it right but a bit early.

About these games that weren't as popular as they should have been—is there anything in particular you wish people would give a second shot that they missed when it first came out?
I was very proud of the game called Pandora's Box. While I worked at Microsoft I came up with what I imagined for myself as a new genre. It was new at the time: a genre of visual puzzles. Puzzles which don't rely too much on logic and heavy thinking, but more on imagination and the feel of the shape and the color based on the picture. A very good example of a visual puzzle is jigsaw puzzles. There's no logic; it's just to find the right pieces and [connect] them to each other. And based on this stuff, I came up with lots of original puzzles and put them together into the title called Pandora's Box. It was a big set of all kinds of visual puzzles. And it didn't do very well because at that time the resolution of computers wasn't very high and the picture wasn't really pretty when you completed the puzzle. And people weren't very well prepared because the product was kind of original. I really think that maybe it's time, now, to come back to this title and play that again. I approached Microsoft several times to republish it or do another edition of it, but it is a big-scope project, and it's risky, so it hasn't worked so far.

When you're stumped by a particularly difficult problem while creating a game, what's your process for working through it?
If it's a technical problem—if the programmer comes to me and says that they can't do what I want, then I try just to simplify it, because the fact that it's really hard to program means that it will be very hard to play. As for design problems, I don't really remember any very big design problems, because usually I have lots of thoughts in my head about how to simplify or complicate the game. Usually it's not very hard.

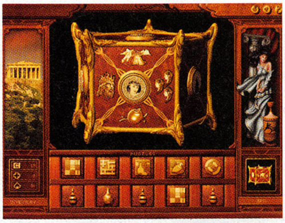
What aspect of creating a video game do you enjoy the most?
I really like to fool my audience. [I like to] create a puzzle [in which] there is an [obvious] way to try to solve it and a way that is better. The real way is kind of hidden. So if I can lead people the wrong way and then discover the right way—a real discovery—that is what [laughs] what makes me enjoy the game the most. Look at what I created, you know? My favorite thing is to fool the player with some kind of false solution.

What other games or game creators do you most admire or respect, and why?
Somehow the book industry and the movie industry have really respected creators. In most games, it looks like a collective effort, so there aren't too many individuals who are really famous in game creation, at least during my time. Maybe now the situation has changed, but in my time there weren't too many people that were known for their games. But I really enjoy all the works of Will Wright; I obviously really enjoy all the works of [Shigeru] Miyamoto; and Sid Meier—I always play his games. Those people are my favorites, I could say.

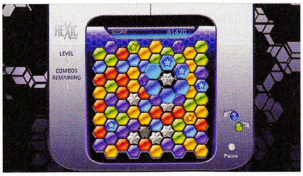
Whose works in other forms of media, such as music or literature, do you most admire or enjoy?
I'm mostly into classical music. Somehow, modern music doesn't touch me at all. [laughs] It's strange but it's true. Basically in music I really enjoy medieval and 18th century composers. As far as literature is concerned, I like all kinds of literature. I can't say I like something really better than another, you know? And movies—basically I like intellectual or artistic works. Again, mainly the classic stuff.

What is your favorite hobby or pastime?
I read books, watch movies, and play games. It's very simple.

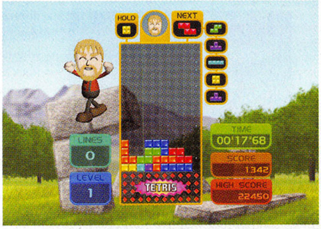
If you could have one superpower, what would it be?
Probably I would like to be able to [interface] directly with the computer without any kind of controller. There are lots of science-fiction movies about that, but that probably would be my choice.



PANDORA'S BOX
1999, PC
GAME DESIGN



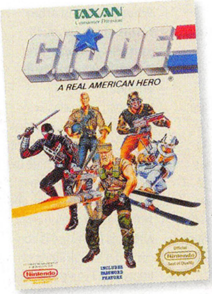
HEXIC HD
2005, XBOX 360
ORIGINAL GAME CONCEPT AND DESIGN



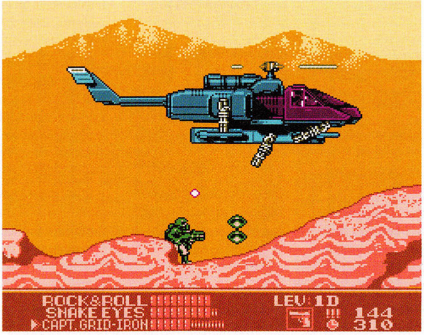
TETRIS PARTY
2008, WiiWARE
ORIGINAL GAME CONCEPT AND DESIGN

G.I. JOE

Fight for freedom wherever there's trouble—even in your NES.



PLATFORM: NES
PUBLISHER: TAXAN
DEVELOPER: KID (KINDLE IMAGINE DEVELOP)
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 1991
COVERED IN ISSUES: 20, 22
BIRD-WIELDING BOSSES: 2



Cobra was a lot more savvy in the G.I. Joe game than in the cartoon show. For example, their attacks could actually hit the Joes.

It's funny—as a whole, licensed games get a deservedly bad wrap, yet when you think back to the great games of yesteryear, there are plenty of fantastic licensed titles. Tiny Toon Adventures, DuckTales, Batman Returns, Willow, and Super Star Wars all fall into the quality category, as does this month's Playback subject: G.I. Joe.

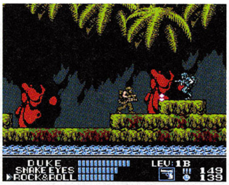
First and foremost, G.I. Joe was a solid, unique action game. Most of its missions were broken into three parts: an infiltration stage (and by infiltration we mean blasting the heck out of anything that moves), a demolitions stage (in which you must explore a nonlinear enemy base and place a predetermined number of time bombs at specific locations), and an evacuation stage (an escape route out of the base that culminated in a challenging boss battle). Good controls, nice visuals, and interesting play mechanics (such as a character-growth system) made for a fun, captivating experience.

However, what made G.I. Joe even better was the developers' smart use of the license. The Joes are all about teamwork, so for each mission you were able to choose three characters from a group of five, each with different abilities. Duke was a well-rounded soldier, whereas machine-gunner Rock & Roll had the best firepower, ninja Snake Eyes had superior jumping ability, and arctic trooper Blizzard, though statistically the weakest, could shoot through walls.

G.I. Joe's enemy, Cobra, was well represented, too, with bosses such as Cobra Commander, the Overlord, and Destro. Of course, some of the enemies were pretty goofy, such as the half-man/half-snake Golobulus, but at least you got to blast them in the face. Vehicles were a big part of the Joe toy line, and they weren't ignored in the game either; not only did you have to battle Cobra vehicles in many boss fights, but you could capture a few of the smaller ones (such as the wall-climbing Buzz Boar) and use them against your enemy.

Though G.I. Joe was arguably publisher Taxan's best title, the company went out of business shortly after the game's release, leaving Capcom to publish the significantly inferior sequel. Now, with a new movie on the way, Electronic Arts has the G.I. Joe license. We can only hope EA's game has the ingenuity of its NES predecessor.

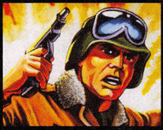
—CHRIS H.



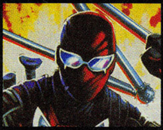
Who wants a body massage?

KNOW JOE

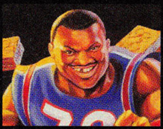
The G.I. Joe franchise has featured many colorful personalities over the years. Here are a few of the most noteworthy.



GENERAL HAWK
Though Duke gets most of the limelight, Hawk was the Joe team's leader. He becomes playable only on the game's last stage, sporting an extremely useful jetpack.



SNAKE EYES
Snake Eyes's face was mangled and his vocal cords were damaged in a helicopter accident. In the game, Snake Eyes uses ninja magic instead of a gun, so he requires no ammunition.



THE FRIDGE
Yes, former Chicago Bears defensive lineman and WWE hall-of-famer William "The Refrigerator" Perry was on the Joe team. Unfortunately, he wasn't in the game, but Joe teammate Capt. Grid-Iron filled the lethal-football-player role nicely.

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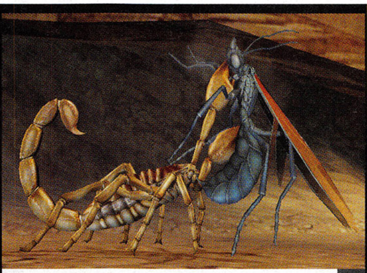
SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT 88

DRAGON QUEST V: HAND OF THE HEAVENLY BRIDE 90



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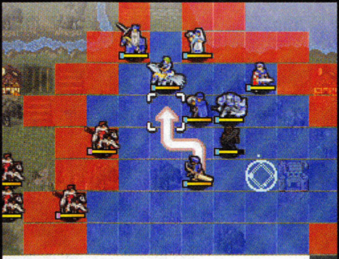

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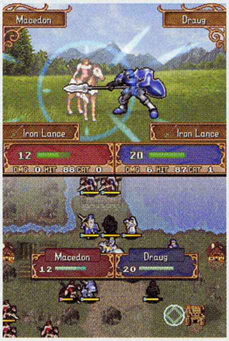
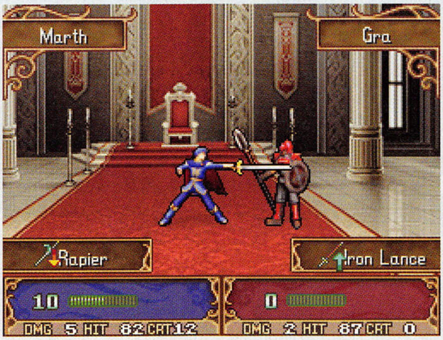

Macedon
Draug
Iron Lance
Iron Lance
12
20
DMG 0 HIT 88 CRT 0
DMG 6 HIT 87 CRT 1
Macedon 12
Draug 20


Marth
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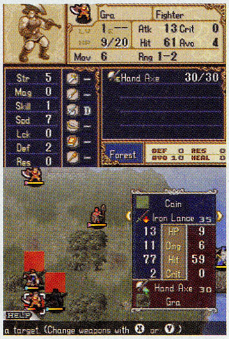
DMG 5 HIT 82 CRT 12
DMG 2 HIT 87 CRT 0


Gra
Fighter
Atk 13 Crit 0
9/20 Hit 61 Avo 4
Mov 6 Rng 1-2
Str 5
Mag 0
Skill 1
Spd 7
Lck 0
Def 2
Res 0
Hand Axe 30/30
Forest
Cain
Iron Lance 35
13 HP 9
11 Dmg 6
77 Hit 59
2 Crit 0
Hand Axe 30
Gra
a target. (Change weapons with X or Y.)

Play with Fire

FIRE EMBLEM: SHADOW DRAGON

RATING: 8.5

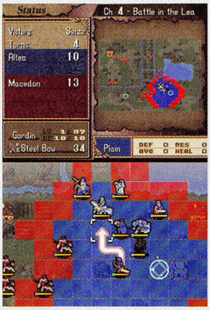
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

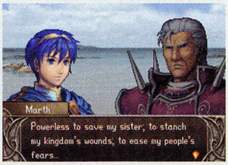
Intelligent Systems returns to the origins of its acclaimed swords-and-sorcery saga with Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon. The first Fire Emblem game, which was released only in Japan for the Famicom in 1990, provides the updated title's basic plot and characters (including Marth, who has gained fame as a regular combatant in the Super Smash Bros. series), but the similarities between the old 8-bit game and the DS version end there. From the graphics to the depth of gameplay, Shadow Dragon is a richer experience by every measure.

At its core, Fire Emblem is about life; the series emphasizes the strategic aspect of mortality by making each unit (or character) unique—lose it and it's gone forever, along with all the time spent and experience gained in building up that character. The penalty for a lapse in concentration or a poor choice in battle is harsh, but knowing that the cost of failure is high makes you a little less reckless than in games such as Advance Wars, where units have no personality and just roll off a production line. Here you'll get to know the characters in your army based on their actions and words as depicted in the many plot-driven cut-scenes: characters come and go, traitors reveal their true colors, enemies become friends, countries vie for power, and people fall in love. Not all strategy RPGs can be called epic, but Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon provides the emotional impact and gaming depth to make it worthy of the word.

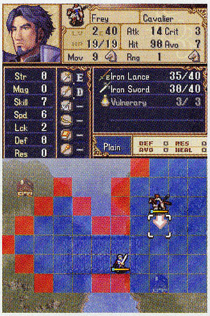
I won't go into much detail about the story or characters because I wouldn't want to deprive anyone of the joy of getting to know their comrades at the pace the game merits. Suffice it to say that young Prince Marth embarks on a quest to restore his nation's honor once his father is betrayed on the battlefield by an old ally, and Marth finds himself cut off from the rest of his family. The new Prologue chapters not only add narrative; they also serve as tutorials. Newbies will have no trouble learning the finer points of the weapons triangle, building up characters, creating new weapons, and so forth. Vets may find the Prologues a bit tedious, but at least they introduce some of the key characters and teach how to access the reams of information that are available in the game. Once the arrows really begin to fly, there is plenty of strategic action for everyone's tastes. From a production-value standpoint, I have few complaints, but there are minor flaws in other aspects of the game. A few of the info-packed profiles are so dense with data that they can be difficult to dissect, and the size of the DS's screen limits how much of a battlefield you can see at one time without scrolling all over the place; several times I forgot about a character that I'd sent off on a sortie, only to be reminded of his fate after several turns, when the poor sap was surrounded and slaughtered. Thankfully, multiple save slots give you the chance to replay history and preserve the lives of your comrades.

As for new elements, Shadow Dragon goes somewhere no previous Fire Emblem game has ventured—online. Hooking up to Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection gives players access to two-player battles, voice chat, a special item shop, bonus cards, and more. Once this game goes into my DS, it'll be there until I've experienced every nuance. **—SCOTT P.**


Status
Ch 4 - Battle in the Lea
Victory Seize
Turns 4
Altea 10
Macedon 13
Gordin
Steel Bow 34
Plain
DEF 0 RES 0
AVO 0 HEAL 0



Powerless to save my sister; to stanch my kingdom's wounds; to ease my people's fears...


Frey
Cavalier
2 40 Atk 14 Crit 3
19/19 Hit 98 Avo 7
Mov 9 Rng 1
Str 8
Mag 0
Skill 7
Spd 6
Lck 2
Def 8
Res 0
Iron Lance 35/40
Iron Sword 38/40
Vulnerary 3/3
Plain
DEF 0 RES 0
AVO 0 HEAL 0

WRITERS' BLOCK

WHAT OTHER GAMECUBE GAMES SHOULD COME TO Wii WITH THE "NEW PLAY CONTROL!" TREATMENT?

Justin Cheng

Well, I'll go with the obvious choice: Super Mario Sunshine. I think that aiming the water spray with a Wii Remote would work pretty darn well.

Chris Hoffman

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker. Using the Wii Remote as Link's Wind Waker baton is a natural fit, and I could use an excuse to replay that game.

Casey Loe

Wave Race: Blue Storm was a great little racer, but it was missing something.... Maybe the Wii Remote can add a bit of zest?

Scott Pelland

The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures might make for the wildest multiplayer adventure ever on Wii.

George Sinfield

I'll go with Freekstyle, EA's SSX with motorbikes. You could twist the Remote for throttle and make gestures to trigger the game's on-and-off-bike stunts.

Chris Slate

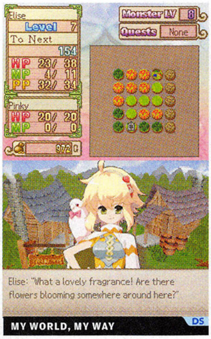
The airy touch of the Wii Wheel would be a perfect fit for the hovercrafts in F-Zero GX. The game's raging difficulty would destroy me, but I'd still give it a go.

David F. Smith

I second Four Swords Adventures. It's a great four-player game already, but widescreen support and Wii controls would make it even better.

Steve Thomason

Luigi's Mansion seems like a no-brainer. I'd love to revisit that tragically underrated adventure using the Wii Remote as the flashlight and Poltergust 3000.



Elise: "What a lovely fragrance! Are there flowers blooming somewhere around here?"

MY WORLD, MY WAY DS

MY WORLD, MY WAY

RATING: 7.0

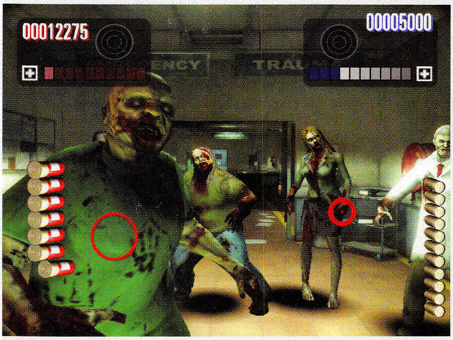
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **GLOBAL A ENTERTAINMENT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Don't let the starry-eyed heroine trick you into thinking this is some sort of My First Adventure for preteen girls. My World, My Way is actually a clever send-up of traditional role-playing games, and it's the fans of the genre who will appreciate it the most.

The star of My World, My Way is a self-absorbed princess embarking on a fake, cliché-filled quest that's been fabricated for her by an actual adventurer. But the princess is no shrinking violet; she has a superhuman ability to pout, and can spend her "pout points" to rewrite the rules of the game. It's a fun twist, and you really do feel like you're getting away with something when you whine more gold and EXP out of a monster or complain your way out of a quest.

My World, My Way was clearly made on a shoestring budget. Field areas are little more than checkerboards, the quests are simple and repetitive (although the game makes an amusing running gag out of that), and the developers lifted the game's monsters, dungeon graphics, and mimic-slime mechanic directly from their previous title, Master of the Monster Lair. But wit and creativity are a good antidote for low production values, and they've transformed this otherwise-forgettable RPG into something far more likeable.

—CASEY L.



Home Is a Decapitated Zombie

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKILL

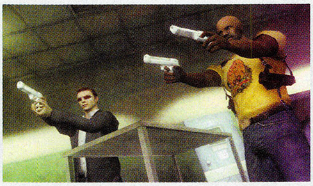
RATING: 8.0

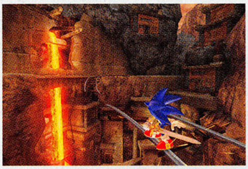
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **HEADSTRONG GAMES**
ESRB: **MATURE**

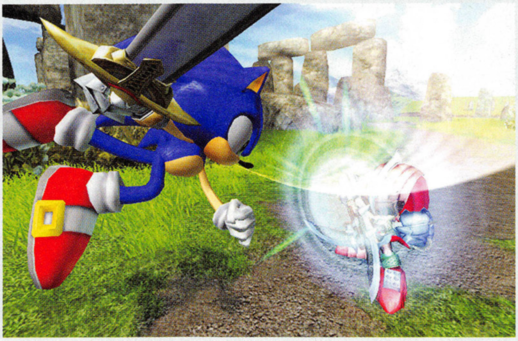
Sega's long-running light-gun franchise gets a grindhouse-inspired makeover, and the result is one of Wii's greatest guilty pleasures. With buckets of gore and language that would make a sailor blush, Overkill definitely earns its M rating. But pumping zombies full of hot lead has rarely been so much fun. The clever choice of motif fits like a glove, and developer Headstrong pulls it off nicely, from the cool B-movie-style trailers that introduce each level to the grainy film effect that overlays the impressive visuals. Sure, the dialogue isn't exactly Tarantino-quality, but it has its share of (intentionally) laugh-out-loud moments, and the lines are always delivered with fervor. Of course, the game also delivers on the core tenets of a top-notch light-gun shooter; levels are interesting and varied, you can calibrate the Wii Remote for greater accuracy, and these zombies splatter into gooey chunks with the best of 'em.

Overkill's only significant shortcoming is that it's too easy, especially when playing with a partner. Things can get a bit hairy near the end, but the first few levels and bosses are a breeze. Fortunately, the game is quite a bit longer than any of its predecessors, and it's packed with hidden secrets and unlockables (including an extended Director's Cut that offers a slightly stiffer challenge). A combo system provides a bit of extra depth, as well, and serves as a nice framework for honing your skills. Lock, load, and enjoy.

—STEVE T.







'Hog in Shining Armor

SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT

RATING: 8.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **SONIC TEAM**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Upon seeing the first images of Sonic and the Black Knight, some members of the gaming community may have responded thusly: "A hedgehog with a sword? We've had hedgehogs with guns, hedgehogs that transform and beat people up, and now this? Is Sega serious?" Yes, Sega is serious—and they manage to pull it off in fine fashion.

Contrary to what common sense suggests, Sonic fits in with Arthurian legend surprisingly well. The banter between Sonic and his stuck-up talking sword, Caliburn, is fairly funny, and the interactions between Sonic and the Arthurian versions of characters such as Knuckles, Shadow, and Blaze is entertaining, too (best of all, as far as we can tell, there's no sign of Big the Cat). The whole story, in fact, possesses a unique, endearing charm, and there's a cool plot twist about two-thirds of the way through the game.

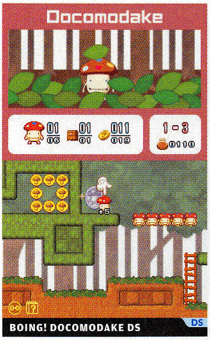
When it comes to the gameplay, Sonic and the Black Knight dishes up some solid action and platforming. Running via the Control Stick and swinging the Wii Remote to attack is far more intuitive than the tilt-based controls of Sonic and the Secret Rings, and since you can slash while you're on the run, the game maintains Sonic's trademark lightning-quick pace. Rushing around obstacles, grinding rails, and climbing walls provide typical Sonic fun, but when massive hordes of enemies show up (and they do) the proceedings can become more methodical than in a traditional Sonic game. You can try to hack your way through, you can block and counter, you can rely on a satisfying gauge-based Soul Surge homing attack, or you can simply jump and spin over most opponents if you'd rather run than fight. Sometimes my standard sword attacks didn't chain together smoothly, leaving me unexpectedly vulnerable, but otherwise combat works well, even in the one-on-one boss duels.

Unlike in Sonic Unleashed, Sega got the game structure right this time. Most of the required missions are straightforward (such as simply making it to the goal, sometimes with a time limit, or defeating a boss), and frustrating tasks and recycled environments are reserved for extra challenges.

Speaking of which, one thing that's especially pleasing about Sonic and the Black Knight is its hidden depth. Casual players who just want to race through the levels and see the ending can do so, but if you want more out of the experience there's a ton to delve into. You can collect equipment, obtain items, forge weapons, interact with villagers, earn new skills in three separate fighting styles, and (eventually) play as alternate characters, but only if you so desire. The core game is actually fairly short—you can beat it in a day—but you can spend weeks overcoming the many optional missions, earning additional followers, and improving your mission rankings, not to mention engaging in ranked online contests and multiplayer versus bouts.

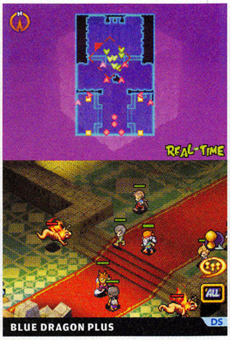
Sonic and the Black Knight also impresses from an aesthetic standpoint. Sega continually produces some of the best graphics on Wii with their Sonic games, and this is no exception; all 13 of the game's environments—which include castles, dungeons, forests, caves, volcanoes, swamps, and more—look beautiful, and they feature some nice flourishes, such as water and heat effects. Of course, the game always runs at a blistering frame rate. The music is also excellent; although a few goofy vocal songs are present, most of the music is medieval-infused rock, providing an epic soundtrack that wouldn't feel out of place in a Final Fantasy game.

If you're looking for an engaging, unique, well-polished take on the world's most famous hedgehog, Sonic and the Black Knight delivers. **—CHRIS H.**



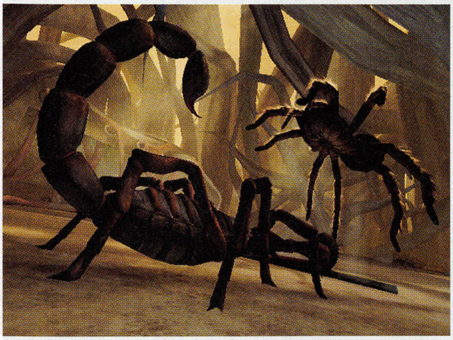
BOING! DOCOMODAKE DS

DS



BLUE DRAGON PLUS

DS



BOING! DOCOMODAKE DS

RATING: **7.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT**
DEVELOPER: **AQ INTERACTIVE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

If this game's title sounds exceptionally Japanese, it's for a good reason. Docomodake, the title's mushroom hero, is actually the mascot for a Japanese mobile-phone operator. The game itself is an action-puzzler chock-full of clever level design. It starts simple, but later stages can be challenging. Most of the puzzles are designed around Doco's ability to split up into several smaller mushrooms that can be dragged around with the stylus to be used as platforms or projectiles. Manipulating the mini Docos is easy to do, and the game's deliberate pace means there's no hassle in using the stylus and the Control Pad simultaneously. Customizable controls would have been nice, though. The action does get a bit repetitive after a while, but this is still an enjoyable adventure. **—PHIL T.**

BLUE DRAGON PLUS

RATING: **8.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT**
DEVELOPER: **BROWNIE BROWN**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

If you played Square Enix's Heroes of Mana from a couple of years ago, you have some idea of what to expect from Blue Dragon Plus. It comes from the same developer, and it's the same kind of game: an old-fashioned strategy-RPG given a boot into the brave new world of real-time combat.

Blue Dragon isn't quite as ambitious as Heroes, though, which, ironically, makes it a better game. Maybe it was made with younger gamers in mind? Whatever their reasons, the designers at Brownie Brown kept their basic control scheme intact. You still point and drag the stylus to move your little squad of fantasy warriors around an isometric battlefield. Blue Dragon's level layouts are generally very simple, though, with more open space and room to maneuver, and its mission objectives are clear and straightforward. There's still plenty of depth here—the main characters have a wide variety of special skills to use, and some levels have quirky hidden features to interact with—but it's not so deep that players will wind up in over their heads.

While Akira Toriyama's characters seemed a little out of place on the Xbox 360 (host to the original Blue Dragon), they're perfect for a handheld game. The bright colors and cartoony designs jump right off the small screen, and it's easy to tell different units apart, even in a crowded, hectic battle. In the chaos of directing eight party members at once, too many complicated details can be fatal. Sometimes less is more, and Blue Dragon Plus proves it. **—DAVID S.**

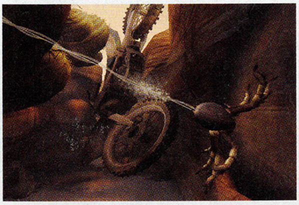
What Lies Beneath

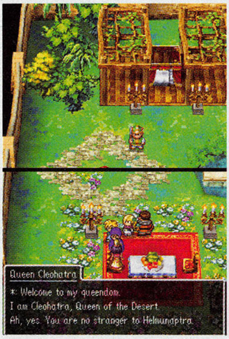
DEADLY CREATURES

RATING: **7.5**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **RAINBOW STUDIOS**
ESRB: **TEEN**

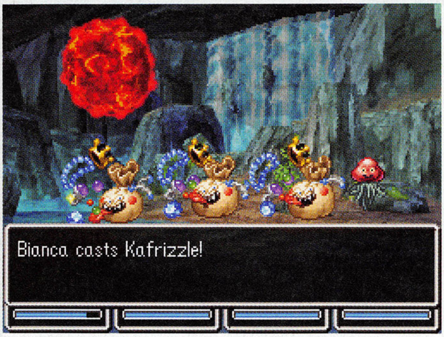
Originality is a rare commodity these days, so no matter what else I may think about Rainbow Studios' Deadly Creatures, I have to give them credit for creating an action-adventure that's unlike anything else out there. Fortunately there's more to it than just a good concept; the game is eerie and atmospheric, and its unique tarantula and scorpion protagonists stand out from the usual heroes. The game excels with its presentation, too; in particular, the monstrous sound effects really drive home the point that these are vicious beasts battling it out in a microcosm of cracks and crevices beneath our feet. The twisting, turning level designs are pretty cool, as well, especially when you get to interact with human-sized objects in later levels. Unfortunately, the environments end up underutilized; despite the fact that you acquire cool world-navigation abilities (such as digging as the scorpion and grappling via a web as the spider), most of the levels feature fairly linear paths and arbitrary walls that prevent you from revisiting particular areas. The game might have benefitted from Metroid-style design instead of being broken into individual levels. I'm not entirely sold on the combat, either. It's not bad, but I always felt disconnected from the action, although I don't know if that's primarily due to a slight lag in the motion controls or to the simple fact that arachnid-fu is a far cry from traditional video game fighting. On the other hand, the storytelling is excellent; the way the unsettling tale unfolds subtly from detached, interwoven viewpoints is something rarely seen in games, and the adventure features a few genuine jump-from-your seat moments. Deadly Creatures isn't perfect, but its unique aspects take it a long way. **—CHRIS H.**



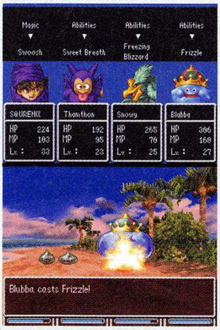


Queen Cleohatra

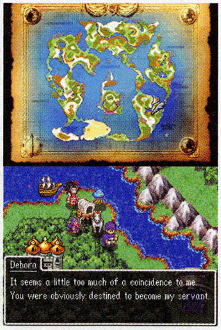
*: Welcome to my queendom.
I am Cleohatra, Queen of the Desert.
Ah, yes. You are no stranger to Helmunaptra.



Bianca casts Kafrizzle!



Blubba casts Frizzle!



Debora

It seems a little too much of a coincidence to me.
You were obviously destined to become my servant.

Heaven-Sent

DRAGON QUEST V: HAND OF THE HEAVENLY BRIDE

RATING: **8.5**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX**
DEVELOPER: **ARTEPIAZZA**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Remakes are among the most difficult games to review, because they mean such different things to different people. A decades-old classic could deliver a powerful nostalgia trip to older players while striking younger players as a clumsy relic. But Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride may be the first Dragon Quest remake to appeal equally to gamers of all ages and experience levels. Despite being based on a 17-year-old game, it's still perfectly capable of snaring new audiences with a powerful hook that, to my knowledge, no game has ever successfully repeated.

You begin your quest as a young boy pursuing fairytale adventures while traveling by your father's side, only vaguely aware of dad's dire mission. As the story advances, your character grows into a man, and you truly feel both the heavy weight of responsibility and the heady thrills of adulthood. Your hero continues to age, taking a wife, fathering children, and uncovering the secrets of his family in a journey that spans nearly two decades. The quest is packed with the usual Dragon Quest standbys: the search for a legendary hero, a lost civilization, the revival of the dark lord, and so on. But this time those elements merely set the stage for a poignant tale of family and personal rites of passage. The most impressive part of the narrative is how skillfully it's conveyed with small background details and brief snippets of dialogue, with almost no tempo-killing cut-scenes. Dragon Quest V is a perfect example of how a talented writer (and a great localization team) can tell a story far more skillfully than a room full of supercomputers and a $10 million CG budget.

I can promise that Dragon Quest V's story will pull you in, but its vapid battle system might push you right back out.

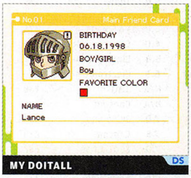
The frequent random encounters are fast-paced and beautifully animated, but light on challenge and almost completely devoid of strategy. In 98% of battles you'll merely order every character to attack, with an occasional break for healing. A new system that allows you to recruit monsters is fun for a while, but fails to provide much variety because the monsters feel like typical fighters, mages, and priests, with little in the way of original or interesting abilities. The constant juggling of equipment and reorganizing of your roster quickly becomes a chore, and you get very little out of it since you usually fill your combat roster with human party members anyway. The game's dungeons are well designed, with light puzzles and interesting layouts, but the incessant battles can make them difficult to enjoy.

Fortunately, the battle system is the only aspect of Dragon Quest V that hasn't received a modern overhaul. The remade graphics and music are beautiful, easily on par with contemporary titles. While the game uses the same basic engine as last year's Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen, it offers much more visual variety, mixing up the usual generic towns and dank dungeons with memorable vistas at a snowy suspension bridge, the base of a hundred-yard waterfall, and a town carved into the sides of a steep mountain. These extravagant locations make the game's dual-screen layout seem less like an afterthought and more like an inspired artistic decision.

It's a shame that this attractive remake couldn't fix all of Dragon Quest V's mechanical failings, but it's done a beautiful job of preserving the game's soulful story. The main quest took me roughly 30 hours to beat, but I have a feeling that Dragon Quest V will stay with me far longer than that. **—CASEY L.**

WE SKI AND SNOWBOARD Wii

NEW PLAY CONTROL! MARIO POWER TENNIS Wii



No 01 Main Friend Card
BIRTHDAY 06.18.1998
BOY/GIRL Boy
FAVORITE COLOR
NAME Lance

MY DOITALL DS

NEW PLAY CONTROL! PIKMIN Wii

WE SKI AND SNOWBOARD

RATING: 6.5

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

If you liked last year's We Ski, you'll like We Ski and Snowboard—the sequel takes the basic gameplay from the original and throws (surprise, surprise) snowboards into the mix. With this addition comes some new gameplay elements such as half-pipes and bigger mountains, as well as the ability to grind. It's certainly a charming game with cute characters, and it's fun to ski or snowboard using the Wii Balance Board. However, as with its predecessor, you have more-precise control using just the Wii Remote and Nunchuk. And although there is a good number of activities available to you—races, slaloms, search and rescue, etc.—the game as a whole is ultimately on the shallow side. **—JUSTIN C.**

ALSO THIS MONTH

Nintendo's New Play Control! series—which takes classic GameCube games and tailors them for Wii with widescreen support and, of course, motion controls—kicks off this March with Pikmin and Mario Power Tennis. Real-time strategy game **New Play Control! Pikmin** especially benefits from this new play style, improving the already-great game by making it even easier to aim your plantlike helpers at objects and enemies using the Wii Remote.... **New Play Control! Mario Power Tennis** is pretty much what you expect: it's Mario Power Tennis with Wii Sports Tennis-style controls (though unlike Wii Sports Tennis, you can move your character around using the Control Stick). Your arms will get a workout as you swing the Wii Remote like a tennis racket. Unfortunately, there are a few instances when the motion controls aren't quite as accurate as they should be, but the overall game is still enjoyable.... If you have a burning desire to improve your math skills, there are worse ways to do it than Nintendo's **Personal Trainer: Math**. The title features numerous types of drills and is currently available for DS.... Basically an organization and socializing tool, Tomy's **My DoItAll** for DS lets users interact, play minigames, and use various tools, such as a calculator.... Capcom's **Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop** for Wii may be brutal in more ways than one. The game had some issues the last time we played it.... Several other late February and early March releases didn't make it time for evaluation this issue. Look for reviews of Sega's **MadWorld** (Wii), Electronic Arts's **Zubo** (DS), PopCap's **Peggle: Dual Shot** (DS), and D3Publisher's **Puzzle Quest: Galactrix** (DS) next issue.

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[REVIEWS ARCHIVE]

Take It Slow

Six games. Six freakin' games. That's all we reviewed last issue. Still, half of the games scored a 7.0 or higher (not *much* higher, though—the two highest-rated titles, Fishing Master: World Tour and Legacy of Ys: Books I & II, got 7.5s). The good thing about these slow months is that it gives you plenty of time to catch up on any games you might have missed.

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS.
• INDICATES WI-FI COMPATIBLE

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Wii				
AC/DC Live: Rock Band Track Pack	N/A	MTV Games	237	T
Alone in the Dark	4.0	Atari	232	M
• Animal Crossing: City Folk	8.0	Nintendo	236	E
Backyard Baseball '09	N/A	Atari	231	E
Battle of the Bands	7.0	THQ	228	T
Blast Works: Build, Trade, Destroy	8.5	Majesco	229	E
Boogie SuperStar	7.0	Electronic Arts	235	E10+
Boom Blox	8.0	Electronic Arts	229	E
Brothers in Arms: Double Time	7.0	Ubisoft	235	M
• Call of Duty: World at War	8.0	Activision	237	M
Castle of Shikigami III	7.0	Aksys	228	T
• Castlevania Judgment	7.0	Konami	236	T
Celebrity Sports Showdown	4.5	EA Sports	235	E
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	N/A	Disney Interactive	229	T
Cooking Mama World Kitchen	6.5	Majesco	236	E
Crash: Mind over Mutant	N/A	Activision	235	E10+
Dance Dance Revolution Hottest Party 2	8.0	Konami	234	E10+
de Blob	8.0	THQ	234	E
Death Jr.: Root of Evil	7.0	Eidos	230	T
Deca Sports	N/A	Hudson	229	E
Dokapon Kingdom	8.5	Atlus	235	E10+
Dream Pinball 3D	N/A	SouthPeak	228	E10+
Emergency Heroes	N/A	Ubisoft	230	E10+
Emergency Mayhem	N/A	Codemasters	228	T
FaceBreaker K.O. Party	5.0	Electronic Arts	235	T
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	7.5	System 3	233	E
FIFA Soccer 09 All-Play	7.5	Electronic Arts	235	E
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	7.5	Square Enix	231	E10+
• Fishing Master: World Tour	7.5	Hudson	238	E
• Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	7.0	RedOctane	232	T
• Guitar Hero World Tour	8.5	Activision	236	T
Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	6.5	Natsume	233	E
The Incredible Hulk	3.5	Sega	231	T
Iron Man	5.5	Sega	229	T
The King of Fighters: The Orochi Saga	8.0	SNK Playmore	235	T
Kung Fu Panda	N/A	Activision	230	E10+
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	7.0	Warner Bros.	235	E10+
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7.5	LucasArts	230	E10+
Line Rider 2: Unbound	5.0	Inxile	234	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Lost in Blue: Shipwrecked	6.5	Konami	235	E10+
Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
• Madden NFL 09 All-Play	9.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
• Mario Kart Wii	9.0	Nintendo	228	E
Mario Super Sluggers	7.5	Nintendo	233	E
MiniCopter: Adventure Flight	6.5	Aksys	228	E
MLB Power Pros 2008	7.0	2K Sports	232	E
Monster Lab	6.5	Eidos	236	E10+
Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars	8.0	Gamecock	236	E10+
MySims Kingdom	7.5	Electronic Arts	235	E
Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution 2	8.0	Tomy	235	T
NASCAR Kart Racing	6.0	EA Sports	238	E
• NBA Live 09 All-Play	4.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
NCAA Football 09 All-Play	5.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
Need for Speed Undercover	6.5	Electronic Arts	236	T
Neighborhood Games	N/A	THQ	238	E
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	N/A	Capcom	236	E
NHL 2K9	7.0	2K Sports	234	E10+
Okami	7.5	Capcom	228	T
Order Up!	7.0	Zoo Games	232	E
Pop Star Guitar	N/A	XS Games	236	T
• Quantum of Solace	5.0	Activision	237	T
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	5.5	Ubisoft	236	E10+
Rock Band	8.0	MTV Games	231	T
• Rock Band 2	9.0	MTV Games	237	T
Rock Band Track Pack Volume 1	6.5	MTV Games	232	T
Rock Band Track Pack Volume 2	N/A	MTV Games	237	T
Rock Revolution	4.5	Konami	235	T
Rubik's World	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Rygar: The Battle of Argus	7.0	Tecmo	236	T
Sam & Max Season One	7.0	The Adventure Company	233	T
• Samba de Amigo	9.0	Sega	234	E
Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip	7.0	Ubisoft	236	E10+
SimAnimals	N/A	Electronic Arts	238	E
SimCity Creator	6.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
Skate It	6.0	Electronic Arts	237	E
SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1	8.5	SNK Playmore	233	T
Sonic Unleashed	8.0	Sega	236	E10+
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E10+
Speed Racer	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	229	E
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	6.5	Activision	236	T
SPRay	3.0	Tecmo	235	E10+
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels	4.0	LucasArts	236	T
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	7.5	LucasArts	233	T
Summer Sports: Paradise Island	3.5	Destineer	228	E
Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World	8.0	Namco Bandai	236	T
Tenchu: Shadow Assassins	7.0	Ubisoft	238	M
• Tiger Woods PGA Tour All-Play	8.5	Electronic Arts	233	E
TNA Impact!	5.0	Midway	235	T
Tomb Raider Underworld	7.0	Eidos	236	T
Top Spin 3	7.0	2K Sports	229	E
Ultimate Band	6.0	Disney	235	E
Ultimate Shooting Collection	N/A	UFO	237	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
Wario Land: Shake It!	8.0	Nintendo	234	E
We Cheer	6.0	Namco Bandai	235	E10+
• We Love Golf!	8.5	Capcom	231	E10+
We Ski	6.0	Namco Bandai	229	E
• Wii Music	N/A	Nintendo	235	E
Wild Earth: African Safari	N/A	Majesco	228	E
WordJong Party	N/A	Destineer	238	E
• WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	8.0	THQ	236	T
NINTENDO DS				
Age of Empires: Mythologies	7.0	THQ	236	E10+
Arkanoid DS	6.5	Square Enix	230	E
AWAY: Shuffle Dungeon	7.0	Majesco	235	E10+
Bangai-O Spirits	8.0	D3PA	232	E10+
Big Bang Mini	8.5	SouthPeak	237	E
Bleach: Dark Souls	8.5	Sega	234	T
Brain Quest Grades 3 & 4	N/A	Electronic Arts	235	E

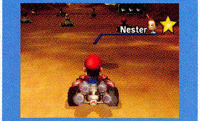
REVIEWER NOTES

TNA IMPACT!

TNA Impact! has a long way to go before it's a contender. The controls are far from intuitive, and the reversal system is woefully inadequate. There's a decent selection of characters, but it's pretty ridiculous that you can't play as any of them in the game's story mode. **—CHRIS H.**

TENCHU: SHADOW ASSASSINS

Shadow Assassins offers some solid stealth gameplay, but I wish it wasn't quite so linear. **—STEVE T.**



MARIO KART Wii

At the time I reviewed Mario Kart Wii, I wasn't able to fully test its many Wi-Fi features (it's tough to find people to play against before a game even goes on sale). Now that I've spent nine months trading shells with other Kart fanatics, I can say that this is the most fun I've ever had playing a game online. This classic Kart action is virtually hitch-free for an online game, and the quest for a higher VR ranking really pulls me into the race. My only small complaint is that karts are at a bit of a disadvantage against bikes. **—CHRIS SL.**

Brain Quest Grades 5 & 6	N/A	Electronic Arts	235	E
Brain Voyage	N/A	Eidos	228	E
Cake Mania 2	6.5	Majesco	230	E
• Call of Duty: World at War	N/A	Activision	236	T
Carnival Games	4.5	2K Games	231	E
• Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	8.0	Konami	235	T
The Chase: Felix Meets Felicity	5.0	Atari	238	E
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	N/A	Disney Interactive	229	E10+
Chrono Trigger	9.0	Square Enix	236	E10+
Civilization Revolution	7.5	2K Games	231	E10+
Code Lyoko: Fall of Xana	N/A	The Game Factory	230	E
Commando: Steel Disaster	N/A	XS Games	229	E10+
Crash: Mind over Mutant	N/A	Activision	235	E
Crosswords DS	N/A	Nintendo	228	E
Disgaea DS	7.5	NIS America	233	T
Dragon Ball: Origins	7.0	Atari	235	E
Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen	7.5	Square Enix	233	E10+
Drawn to Life: SpongeBob Squarepants Edition	7.0	THQ	234	E
Dream Pinball 3D	N/A	SouthPeak	228	E10+
Drone Tactics	7.0	Atlus	229	E10+
Elebits: The Adventures of Kai and Zero	7.0	Konami	237	E
Etrian Odyssey II: Heroes of Lagaard	8.5	Atlus	230	E10+
Exit DS	7.5	Square Enix	234	E
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	6.0	System 3	233	E
Final Fantasy IV	9.0	Square Enix	231	E10+
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	7.0	Square Enix	230	E10+
Gauntlet	7.5	Eidos	236	T
• GRID	8.5	Codemasters	230	E
Guitar Hero On Tour	8.0	Activision	232	E10+
Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades	7.0	Activision	237	E10+
Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness	7.0	Natsume	231	E
The Incredible Hulk	7.5	Sega	231	E10+
Iron Man	5.0	Sega	229	E10+
Izuna 2: The Unemployed Ninja Returns	5.0	Atlus	232	T
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	5.0	Aksys	229	T
Kirby Super Star Ultra	9.0	Nintendo	234	E
Kung Fu Panda	N/A	Activision	230	E10+
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
Legacy of Ys: Books I & II	7.5	Atlus	238	T
The Legend of Kage 2	8.0	Square Enix	234	E10+
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon	N/A	Activision	236	E
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	7.5	Warner Bros.	235	E10+
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7.5	LucasArts	230	E
Line Rider 2: Unbound	6.0	Inxile	234	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Little Red Riding Hood's Zombie BBQ	5.0	Destineer	235	T
Lock's Quest	7.0	THQ	234	E
Looney Tunes: Cartoon Conductor	6.5	Eidos	230	E
The Lord of the Rings: Conquest	5.0	Electronic Arts	238	E10+
Luminous Arc 2	7.0	Atlus	236	T
Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa	N/A	Activision	236	E
Madden NFL 09	N/A	Electronic Arts	232	E
Master of the Monster Lair	6.5	Atlus	235	E10+
• Mega Man Star Force 2	7.0	Capcom	230	E
Metal Slug 7	7.5	Ignition	236	T
Mister Slime	6.0	SouthPeak	230	E
MLB 2K8 Fantasy All-Stars	6.5	2K Sports	228	E
Monster Lab	8.0	Eidos	236	E10+
Moon	7.5	Mastiff	236	T
The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor	N/A	Vivendi Games	231	T
Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi	5.0	Gamecock	236	E
Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir	6.5	Nintendo	234	E
• N+	7.0	Atari	228	E
Nancy Drew: The Mystery of the Clue Bender Society	N/A	Majesco	232	E10+
• Naruto: Path of the Ninja 2	6.5	Tomy	234	E10+
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	6.0	Capcom	236	E
• New International Track and Field	8.0	Konami	232	E10+
Ninjatown	8.0	SouthPeak	235	E
Personal Trainer: Cooking	N/A	Nintendo	237	E
• Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness	7.5	Nintendo	229	E
• Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time	7.5	Nintendo	229	E
• Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia	8.0	Nintendo	236	E
Pop Cutie! Street Fashion Simulation	6.0	Koei	233	E
Populous	7.0	XSEED	234	T
• Prey the Stars	5.5	Koei	234	E10
Prince of Persia: The Fallen King	7.0	Ubisoft	237	E
Princess on Ice	N/A	Aksys	235	E
Puchi Puchi Virus	7.0	NIS America	228	E
Quantum of Solace	6.0	Activision	237	T
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	N/A	Ubisoft	236	E10+
Retro Game Challenge	8.0	XSEED	237	RP
Robocalypse	7.5	Tecmo	235	E10+
Rock Revolution	5.0	Konami	235	E10+
Rondo of Swords	6.5	Atlus	228	E10+
Rubik's World	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Rune Factory 2: A Fantasy Harvest Moon	7.0	Natsume	237	E
Shaun the Sheep	4.0	D3Publisher	235	E
Shaun White Snowboarding	N/A	Ubisoft	236	E
SimAnimals	N/A	Electronic Arts	238	E
• Skate It	5.5	Electronic Arts	237	E
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood	8.0	Sega	234	E
Soul Bubbles	6.5	Eidos	230	E
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E
Space Invaders Extreme	8.0	Square Enix	230	E
• Spectrobes: Beyond the Portals	8.0	Disney	235	E10+
Speed Racer	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	229	E
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	N/A	Activision	235	E10+
Spore Creatures	8.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Jedi Alliance	6.0	LucasArts	236	E
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	6.0	LucasArts	233	T
Summon Night: Twin Age	7.5	Atlus	229	E10+
Super Dodgeball Brawlers	6.5	Aksys	229	E
Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop 3	N/A	Namco Bandai	230	E
• Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff	6.0	Tecmo	235	E
Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Thingys	7.0	Ignition	228	E10+
Theresia	N/A	Aksys	235	M
Time Hollow	7.0	Konami	234	T
• Tom Clancy's EndWar	N/A	Ubisoft	236	T
Tomb Raider Underworld	N/A	Eidos	236	T
Tony Hawk's Motion	4.0	Activision	237	E
Top Spin 3	6.0	2K Sports	229	E
Tornado	6.0	Ignition	234	E
Transformers Animated: The Game	7.0	Activision	235	E
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	8.5	Atlus	231	T
Unsolved Crimes	4.5	Empire	234	T
• Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise	7.0	THQ	234	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
What's Cooking? Jamie Oliver	N/A	Atari	235	E
The World Ends With You	9.0	Square Enix	228	T
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	4.0	THQ	236	T
Zenses: Oceans	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Zenses: Rainforest	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E

CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA

You can always count on the handheld Castlevania games to deliver a great time. The wider range of environments is nice, but the new Glyph weapons system doesn't really offer anything different other than a shred more strategy. The challenge has been beefed up, though; the impressive bosses are especially tough. —CHRIS H.

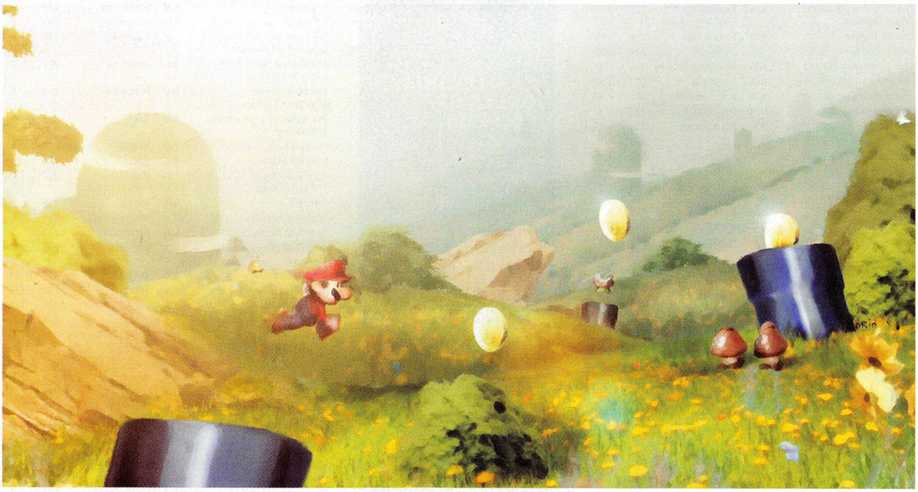
MADDEN NFL 09 ALL-PLAY

This year's excellent version of Madden is just what the doctor ordered to help me forget the Vikes' dismal play-off performance. —STEVE T.

SONIC UNLEASHED

During the daytime stages, Sonic Unleashed is the best Sonic game I've played in years. It really feels like old-school Sonic, especially when the camera switches to the classic side view. But when nighttime rolls around and the Blue Blur becomes a Werehog, my enthusiasm starts to wane. —JUSTIN C.

COMMUNITY



FANDOM

Bringing 2-D Back

One artist attempts to redesign his favorite games for the HD era.

Like many longtime gamers, 28-year-old Mikaël Aguirre fondly remembers a time when 2-D games were king and 3-D was limited to vector graphics and Super FX chips. But unlike most, he's used his considerable graphic-design skills to create "high-def remake" images based on games like Super Mario World and Super Metroid, which are drawing rave reviews on his website (http://orioto.deviantart.com). Armed with Adobe Photoshop and a Wacom tablet device, the Paris, France-based A/V technician re-creates scenes from his favorite games, replacing the familiar pixels with vividly painted characters and lush, detailed landscapes. As you can see, the end result is stunning artwork that we'd just as soon frame as desire to see in a real game. We pinged Mikaël to see how he does it and what's up next. —ANDREW H.

NINTENDO POWER How did you get started re-creating scenes and characters from video games?

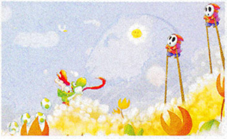
MIKAËL AGUIRRE I was always really fond of imagery and such things. Photoshop is like a playground for me, and I learned it by myself. My studies were more about audio/visual and cinema, but it's all linked. I discovered video games in 1992, and I always fantasized about how they could look better. The "death" of 2-D with the release of Super Mario 64 was a complete shock for me, as I'd imagined a colorful and luxurious 2-D Mario game with many, many levels!

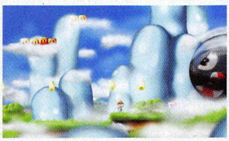
I always have been frustrated with how 3-D games were often changing the artistic direction and cultural background of earlier games. I feel, even if old games are graphically simple, that their aesthetic has a real artistic value, and it should be a strong base to work from. I simply love the idea of adapting something and bringing it to life with its real soul. I learned to do photo manipulation and matte painting in recent years, so one day, as I was seeing someone's Sonic the Hedgehog fan project, I said to myself, "Why don't you try to do it your way?"

Describe for us the entire process of creating one of your HD remake images. How long does it take?

The process usually takes 20 to 30 hours, depending on the amount of work. When I first started, I'd take a screenshot of the original scene I wanted to remake and begin to matte paint on it, manipulating little pieces of photography and shading it to make the whole thing coherent. I'm always working with different layers of depth, as if I was working with traditional 2-D graphics. I don't want it to be completely impossible to do in a real game, even if memory problems would maybe make it a little difficult to do on actual hardware.

After that, I thought that it would be more interesting to really create a new background/level for the game, so I began to work with landscape painting or photography references. In other words, I prefer to take some real living place and make it like it should be in a game universe, rather than take a video game screen and make it look real. But the process is always the same: I'm assembling a ton of picture pieces—shading, coloring, retracing, and painting over it—to make something completely new.





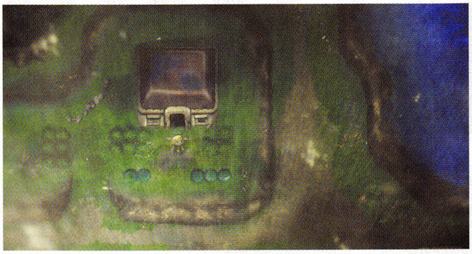
How do you decide which video game scenes to re-create?
I decide, of course, on games I like. Sometimes I follow requests from fans. Other times, I just see a picture and think, "Hey, wouldn't it be nice and interesting to do this," and just begin to work on it to see out of curiosity.

Have you been contacted by any game companies that appreciate your work?
I've not been contacted by any game companies yet! If it happens, my skills and training (as a movie director) would make me a better artistic director or advisor than a graphic or concept artist. I would love to make a game come to life, pointing in a particular direction and making good choices and compromises to achieve a certain ambition and to make gamers wowed, as would say [Nintendo president Satoru] Iwata!

What kinds of images are you planning to work on next?
I'm continuing on with side-scrolling games, because I just love the way they play on a sense of depth and movement. I may begin to do some more conceptual art for an RPG or 3-D games in the near future, for experimental studies. Final Fantasy VI is my favorite game of all time, so I should try to do something with it. But I just want it to be a constructive material—it should be an example of what could be done with the game, rather than a piece of random fan art. I want to maintain a concrete proposition!

What are some of your favorite games?
I began playing in 1992 [on] a Super NES with Super Mario World and Street Fighter II. Those games remain favorites today. I love Super Mario World and Super Mario Galaxy in particular, and the Alpha and Vs. series from Capcom's Street Fighter, as well as SNK's fighters. I also really love 16-bit-era Square games like Final Fantasy, Chrono Trigger, and Secret of Mana. And finally, I would say puzzle games—Puyo Puyo in particular—and some racers like Wave Race 64 and Uniracers!

What is it about Nintendo games and characters that inspire your work?
It's obviously a matter of cultural references. The whole Nintendo background is what made part of my childhood. I like the way Nintendo artists gave a symbolic, fanciful, and luxurious shape to a simple concept. The NES and Super NES eras built a real artistic world, with their visual codes and sounds. It was abstract and lighthearted. It's really hard to find that now, because it's all matter of marines and aliens! More seriously, gamers have become more mature, and more westerners [play now], I guess. Realism is the key now, but it seems like a mistake to me. It's far less impressive to look at our world re-created in a video game than to see a complete imaginary world come to life. I want games with a magical, strong mood, where I'm literally drawn into its universe.



ABOVE *and* BEYOND

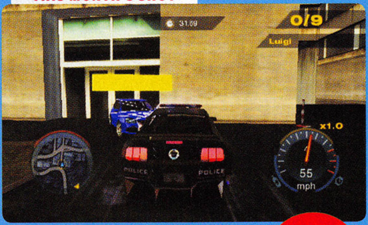
Got art, cosplay, case mods, etc.? Send them to us via email to **community@nintendopower.com** or via snail mail to Nintendo Power/Community c/o Future US, 1000 Marina Blvd., Suite 510, Brisbane, CA 94005. We'll run the best stuff in this section.

WRITE YOUR OWN CAPTION

Screen Test

There's just something funny about a giant lizard getting poked in the belly, as evidenced by Volume 237's Dokapon Kingdom sceenshot. Look below to see some of the readers' clever captions to go along with that humorous image. This month, we have the need for...more captions. Send your best ones to **screentest@nintendopower.com.**

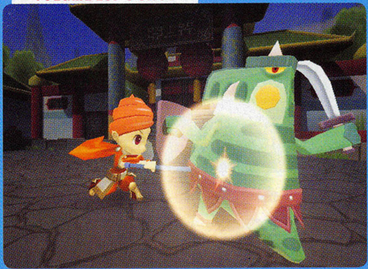
THIS MONTH'S SHOT



The Decepticons were removed from Mario Kart after being deemed "too aggressive."

HERE'S OUR CAPTION.
THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER?

VOLUME 237'S SHOT

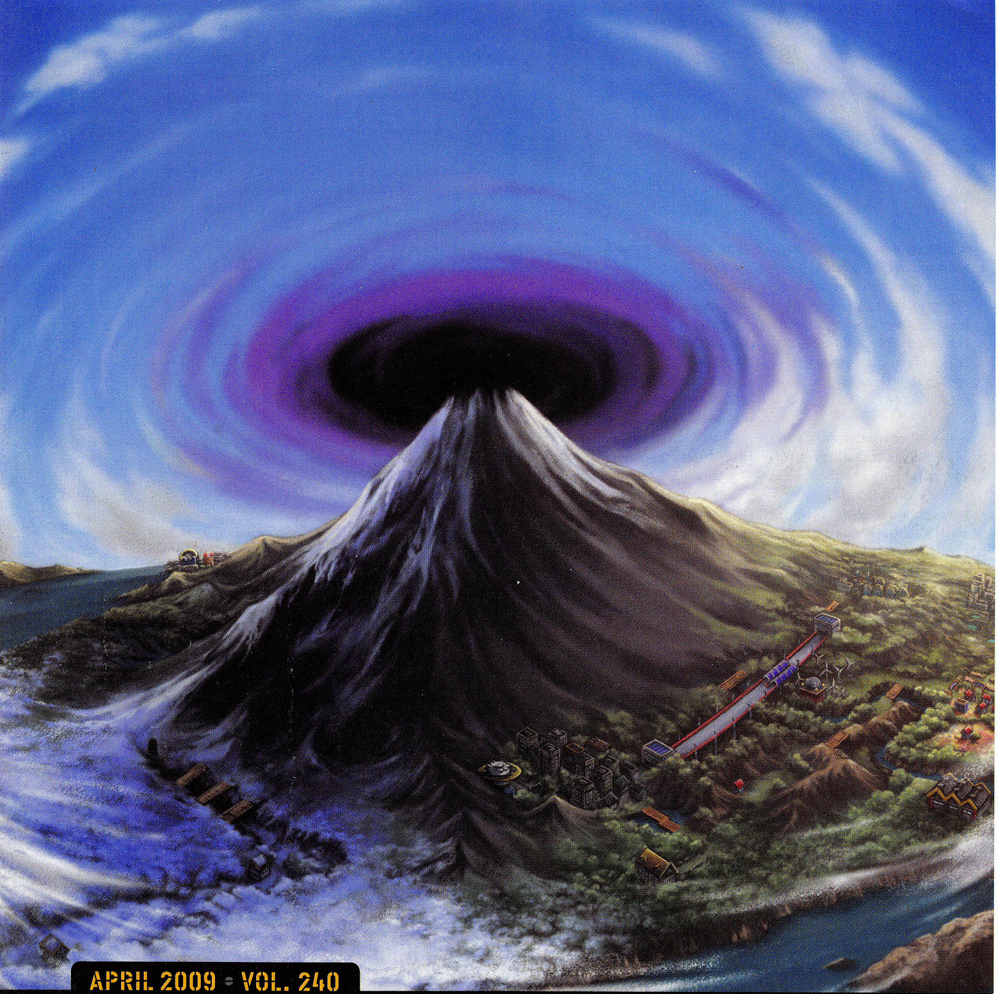


"Giant lizards always look to the bright side, which is a big problem for them." —**NOTTUROK**

"Removing the belly button lint proved harder than originally thought." —**ABBIE R.**

"After carrying it all the way home, she soon realized her giant light up lizard was halfway dead." —**JOHNPAUL COLLINS**

"Oops! I should have checked for lizards carrying swords *before* I tried out my new bubble wand." —**BRIAN D.**



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NEXT MONTH

We'll have a big look at Nintendo's Rhythm Heaven, which is sure to be one of the year's best DS games, plus reviews of top titles like Wii's MadWorld, not to mention our Pokémon Platinum Version cover story. Start training!

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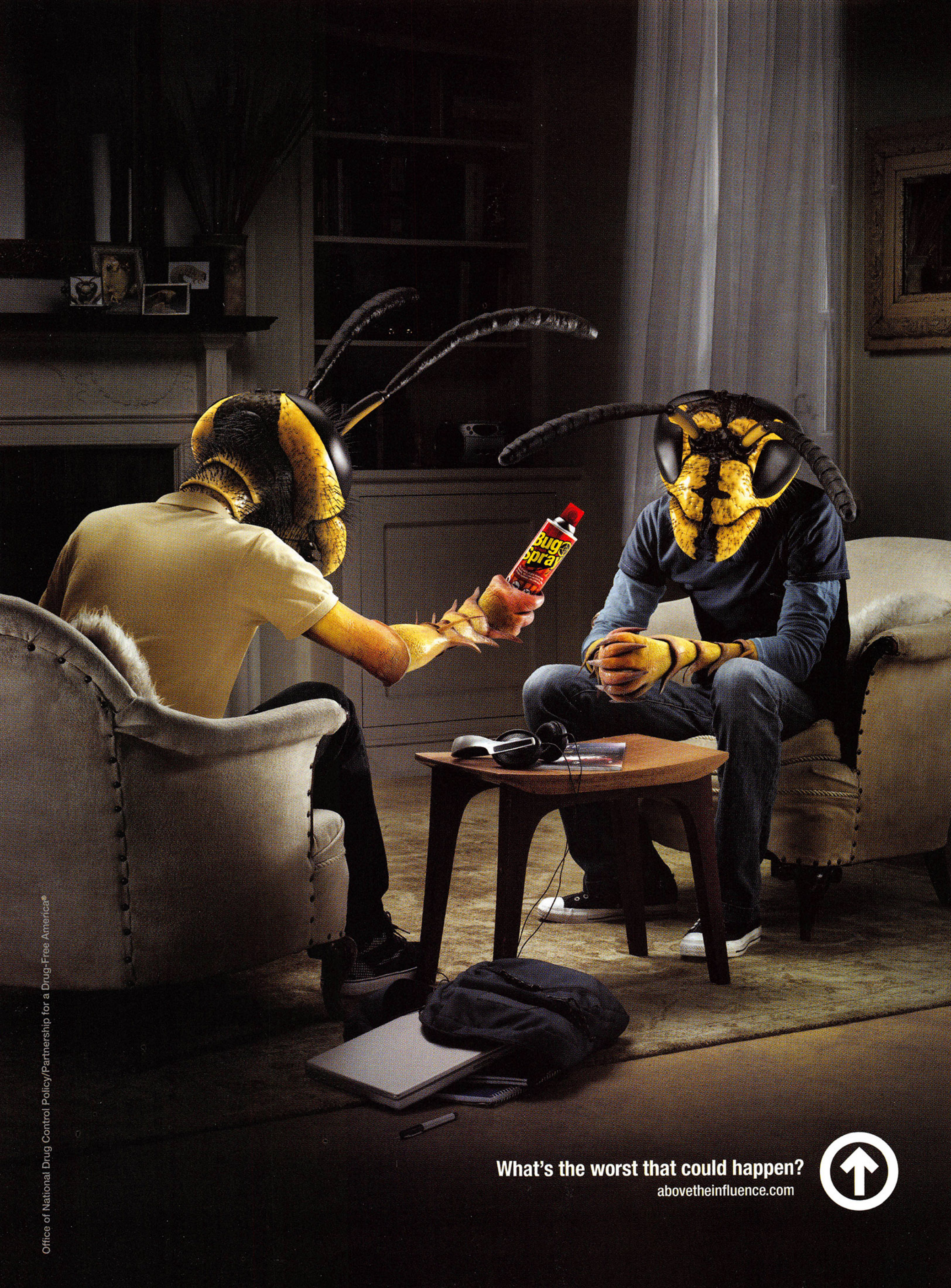
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